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ABRAHAM

THE FRIEND OF GOD

A STUDY FROM

OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

BY

J. OSWALD DYKES, M.A., D.D.

THIRD EDITION.

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PREFACE.

MODERN religious literature in England is far from rich in monographs on the subject of these pages. The recent volume of the Rev. R. Allen, M.A., entitled, *Abraham, his Life, Times, and Travels, as by a contemporary* (1875), offers a promising title, but is really an attempt to work up such historical materials as we possess into a romance or narrative fiction. The attempt has not yet been carried farther than the early portion of the patriarch's career. In *Lectures on Abraham,* published in 1831, by the Rev. H. Blunt, M.A., and in the later volume, *From Ur to Machpelah,* by the Hon. and Rev. L. J. Barrington, M.A., practical edification is the object chiefly kept in view, to which the history is made contributory. With the exception of an anonymous book of similar character, which issued from the Edinburgh press in

1841, this brief list exhausts the recent contributions to the literature of this subject with which I am acquainted.

There was therefore room enough for such a 'study' as the following, however defective its execution may be judged to be. Probably few of those into whose hands this little work shall fall, will be better aware of its shortcomings than the writer himself. An endeavour has at least been made to tell anew the venerable story, without obtruding such lessons as it is the preacher's function to enforce, yet with a constant regard to this patriarch's place in the unfolding of revelation, as well as a constant effort to set his life in the best light which modern research has shed upon it. In pursuing such a design, it seemed uncalled-for to discuss those questions which have been raised respecting the authorship of Genesis, or the time and method of its composition. Biblical criticism is very far indeed from having spoken its last word on any of these points. So far from that, hardly a single result has yet been ascertained with such certainty that it can claim a place in the public teaching of the Church, or in a book designed, not for experts, but for the Christian people. The author has therefore deemed it wiser, after consideration, to assume throughout that the sacred

narrative as it stands, forms our one reliable authority for the biography of the founder of the Jewish race.

The writer of a volume like this is of necessity a gatherer, to a large extent, from other men's labours. Special obligations have usually been acknowledged in footnotes; still it is fair to indicate beforehand the authors whose aid has been sought throughout. For Eastern topography, history, and manners, the works of Ritter, Robinson, Rawlinson, Stanley, Porter, Thomson, and Tristram have been those most carefully consulted; of course along with the Bible Dictionaries, like Herzog, Winer, Smith, and Kitto. In the interpretation of the text, Kalisch, Ewald, and Kurz have been found most serviceable; but many others, such as Delitzsch, Bunsen, Lange, Hengstenberg, etc., have been frequently referred to. Although the Scripture history is, strictly speaking, the only *authority* we possess, neither Josephus, nor the mass of later legend which gathers round Abraham's name, has been overlooked.

That this humble attempt to study the remote beginnings of His covenant of friendship with man may be graciously accepted by Him to Whose praise it is devoted, is a prayer in which the writer trusts to be joined by every reader.

INTRODUCTORY.

WHEN one looks back to the dim beginnings of history, the very first figure which stands forth in full outline is that of 'Abram the Hebrew.' It is true that in those chapters of our oldest record—the Book of Genesis—which refer to a still earlier period, two events at least are related with some minuteness—the fall and the flood. But these are only single events. Before Abram, no individual life has been preserved with any completeness. No man in all these misty millenniums, before or after the deluge, stands before us in such historical fulness of portraiture that we can be said to know him as the great men of later story are known. Adam is little more than a name for a common progenitor, who fell. Noah is the just man who escaped the flood. Names still more shadowy, like Cain or Abel, Enoch or Nimrod, are scarcely anything else than names. A far larger space in Scripture has been devoted to the single life of Abram than to all previous generations put together. His

personal character, the details of his domestic affairs, his migrations, revelations, and trials, are all known with unusual minuteness. In the long series not only of biblical biographies, but of the world's great lives, his is really the first. With him continuous history may be said to open. With him, too, may almost be said to commence the revelation of divine grace to mankind.

A reason for this may be sought in another peculiarity, which lends additional interest to this man's career. No other name in all history forms so conspicuous a starting-point for the developments of after time. 'Abram the Hebrew' stands at the head of many a great stream of history, like the river of Eden which parted into four. Of the leading faiths of the world, there are three which cherish his name with equal veneration; and these three are the only monotheistic faiths. To the Jew, the Moslem, and the Christian alike, the prophet Abraham forms a common ancestor. Trace these three forms of belief to their fountain-head, and they meet in the tent of that ancient confessor, exiled in the dawn of the world for his faith in the unity of God. Divided in so much else, the Englishman and the Turk, the Moor and the Arab, the Catholic and the Jew, agree in deriving their spiritual, if not also their natural, descent from that primeval 'friend of God.'

Most literally has the promise of his new name been fulfilled. He has become a 'father of many nations.'

Above all, it is when one looks closely into the course of revelation in Holy Scripture that the name of Abraham appears to tower over the centuries. In point of fact, it meets none to excel or rival it till the divine name of Jesus Christ Himself is reached. The words of Jesus, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it,' implied this much, whatever more they might import, that the call and covenant of Abraham formed the first step in a long series, of which the last was the advent of Messiah. Across the intervening ages, during which the promises made to Abraham were slowly ripening, the chosen father and his far greater Seed look at one another. What lay between them was mainly covered by the temporary episode of the Mosaic Law. That interval of the Law is explained by St. Paul to have been an interpolation.[1] It could neither annul nor invalidate the covenant made with Abraham. It merely supervened upon that primitive arrangement. It had its own temporary work to do in preparation for the coming of the Saviour. But the splendid promise which God first gave to Abraham—the promise of a blessing in which all nations were to share—only

[1] Gal. iii. 15-19.

reached its accomplishment in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

One simple fact serves to measure the evangelical importance which attaches to the biography of Abraham. In some fourteen or fifteen passages of the New Testament we find his place in the unfolding of revelation distinctly referred to. In several of these passages incidents of his career are carefully discussed, in order to illustrate or confirm cardinal principles of the gospel. Our Lord Himself in His controversy with the Jews, St. Paul in his two leading theological epistles, St. James, and the anonymous writer to the Hebrews,[1] all devote long passages to the exposition of Abraham's position or of the lessons of his life. In fact, the section of the Book of Genesis in which this patriarch's career has been recorded may be called the principal as well as the earliest seed-plot of evangelical teaching; the original field, as it were, in which God sowed those germs of revealed truth which were to ripen through many a changeful century into the harvest of the Christian gospel.

For the sake, therefore, of a better understanding of all after scripture, it ought to be worth our while to study with some pains the character and experiences of this father of all

[1] Consult especially John viii. 33-58; Rom. iv.; Gal. iii. and iv.; James i. 20-24; Heb. vii. and xi. 8-19.

faithful men. At the same time, the age of Abraham lies so far off from our modern life, that it is only by an effort we can render vivid to ourselves the surroundings amidst which it was spent. To most of us it is apt to offer only a faint outline, like objects seen through a fog. To a large extent this cannot be helped. Time has changed much, and has obliterated even more. Still, by the help of recent investigators into Eastern topography and manners, it is possible to reproduce with a fair degree of completeness the local colouring and outward setting of that wonderful life. To realize with any accuracy its intellectual, moral, or religious complexion, and the deeper influences by which it was moulded, is a much more difficult task. It would only be by unlearning the greater part of what he knows, that the modern Christian could put himself into the place of 'Father Abraham.' Fortunately, however, moral inspiration may be caught from so noble an example as his, even though we fail to appreciate fully the difficulties of his position; and the religious lessons, which are for all time, may be read none the less clearly because we do not know through what gloom such rays of light had first to struggle before they lit up his lonely spirit.

I.

UR OF THE CHALDEES.

THOU ART JEHOVAH, THE GOD WHO DIDST CHOOSE ABRAM, AND BROUGHTEST HIM FORTH OUT OF UR OF THE CHALDEES. Neh. IX. 7.

THE GOD OF GLORY APPEARED UNTO OUR FATHER ABRAHAM WHEN HE WAS IN MESOPOTAMIA, BEFORE HE DWELT IN HARAN. Acts VII. 2

I.

UR OF THE CHALDEES.

THE ninth generation after the flood lived in an age of emigration. It has often happened in later history that the removal of compact and adventurous bodies of men to fresh territory has turned the course of nations and changed the earth's face. Such instances as the irruption of the Gothic and Lombardic tribes into Italy, the Saxon occupation of Britain, the intrusion of the Ottoman Turk into Eastern Europe, the settlement of the Puritans in New England, and the present colonization of the Australian continent by Europeans, remind us what vast changes emigration has effected even in modern times. In primitive history, it had of course a still larger part to play. The early families of men must have been constantly on the move. Population probably increased at a more rapid rate than now; and the world was still before them where to choose. Already, before Abram's day,

from the cradle of the race swarm after swarm must have hived off in every direction. The fresh comers either would absorb earlier settlers in the most desirable localities, or push them further afield in search of unoccupied territory. Very little that is certain has yet been recovered of these primitive movements of population. What we discern is only a dim, confused struggle for room; a restless movement outwards; wave after wave of emigrants overlapping each other, impelled by hunger, by love of conquest, or by the pressure of stronger tribes, but always finding leaders of mark and daring to show them the way to more inviting or more secure regions.

It is as one such movement that we must regard the original migration of the Terah (or Terach) family, from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran in Mesopotamia. Probably it formed a minor movement connected with some wider exodus. At least, we learn incidentally, on the authority of Genesis or of a document which that book preserves, that about the same date the arms of a trans-Euphrates state began to be felt as far west as the banks of the Jordan.[1] Uncertainty still hangs over the situation of Ur-Kasdim, the original starting-point of the emigrants. An old tradition long placed it, without dispute, at the city of Edessa, now Orfa, which stands on a spur of the Armenian high-

[1] Gen. xiv. 4.

lands, whence it overlooks the lower rolling country that is enclosed between the upper waters of the Tigris and Euphrates. It forms a natural capital to that northern portion of Mesopotamia to which belonged the ancient name of Padan-Aram, or 'the Syrian plateau.' If this famous city of Edessa were indeed Ur, then Terah and his sons had only moved some twenty miles when they halted at Haran. Recent search, however, in the mounds of ancient Chaldea, far to the south, has revealed in the alluvial plain or delta, where the conjoined waters of the two rivers enter the Persian Gulf, a city called Ur or Hur, which appears to have been the earliest capital of the most ancient monarchy we know of.[1] It cannot be said that the question is yet decided; but the weight of external evidence, as well as of inherent probability, appears to make for the ruin Mugheir, the 'Ur of the Chaldean delta. Here the judgment of competent scholars more and more inclines to place the original seat of Abram's family.[2]

It is not difficult to see reasons why Terah and his children should have moved from the mouth of the Euphrates some four hundred miles up stream, to Haran, on its higher affluents.

[1] Rawlinson's *Ancient Monarchies*, i. 15, 153 (2d ed.).

[2] Josephus, *Ant.* i. 6. 5, speaks of Ur as a well-known Chaldean town, and as quite distinct from Mesopotamia, where Haran lay.

The most powerful and enterprising tribes of that early age belonged to the race of Ham. Already they occupied the best seats both of commerce and of agriculture. Egypt was in their hands. The fat portions of Canaan were held by certain of their tribes — the Jordan valley, for example, and the Tyrian coast-line. Other branches had seized the mouths of the Euphrates, and seem to have formed the strongest element in the mixed population of Chaldea. In that hot, rich delta, the wheat-plant grew indigenous, and the date-palm flourished. Watered from the numerous channels of the river, the soil yielded an hundred, sometimes even three hundred, fold. The command of a sea with sheltered harbours opened to their fragile skiffs the same access to lands beyond as their brethren possessed at the mouth of the Nile. Here, therefore, the Cushite race, which looked to Nimrod as its first leader, had built towns, baking the mud of the valley into bricks; had reared temples, the remains of which still tower over the flat; and had cultivated, to a higher pitch than elsewhere in their time, the arts of civilised life. They invented picture-writing; studied the stars and navigation; made pottery and coarse fabrics; irrigated the soil, and sailed the sea.

Under the hard rule of this strong and clever people were to be found tribes of a different

stock. Among these was probably the Shemite or Semitic family to which Abram's father belonged. Already the same line of Arphaxad, third son of Shem (according to the tables of the 10th of Genesis), appears to have sent off extensive colonies to Southern Arabia. By this date, several generations after the dispersion from the Tower of Babel, it might be numerous enough to send off a second migratory band to Northern Mesopotamia. These men of Shem's line were of different tastes from the Hamites, who ruled the coast delta. They loved pastoral pursuits; they were no agriculturists, and no sailors. Where they did not actually choose nomadic or tent life, they affected small village communities in preference to the larger fortified cities of their neighbours. Above all, they adhered to a somewhat purer religious tradition than obtained among the ruling race. The earliest indications show that the founders and first monarchs of the early Chaldean empire gave themselves up to the development of a polytheistic system, based on the study of the heavenly bodies; and that they led their people into a sensuous, if not yet a profligate, idol-worship. The word Ur itself, like the name of the stock who inhabited it, is believed to denote that its people were worshippers of the moon-god.[1] It

[1] 'The chief Chaldean temple to the moon-god was at Ur or Hur (Mugheir), a city which probably derived its name from him, and

was a period, in fact, at which the tendency to a degradation of men's religious conceptions and practices had become so powerful as to threaten with extinction the primitive faith in one God and His spiritual worship. With this fact, accordingly, the Terah migration has been brought into connection both by Mussulman and by Hebrew tradition. A mass of legend has very long existed in the East, where it has found wide currency, in which Abraham figures as a confessor or teacher of monotheistic truth against prevalent idolatry, who was ultimately compelled, after strange and hair-breadth escapes, to flee from persecution in order that pure religion might be preserved upon the earth. Among the Jews, such a tradition is in substance as old as Josephus; among the Arabs, older than Mohammed. The Jewish version of it has found a place in the Talmud; the Moslem version in the Koran.[1] It was to be expected that, after filtering through such channels, this tradition should come down to us encrusted with a whole pile of wild and unhistorical matter. It is only natural that Nimrod should figure in these legends as the persecuting king; that the birth, the preaching, the sufferings, and deliverance of the prophet should be

which was under his special protection.'—Rawlinson's *Ancient Monarchies*, i. 125.

[1] See the extracts given in Appendix, Note A.

embellished with miraculous incidents; and that the story should be pieced out with details which are plainly borrowed from later martyrology. At the same time, there is no improbability that at the heart of it all may lie a kernel of fact. Scripture affords no hint to which the tale could attach itself. It is all the less likely that such wide-spread and elaborate stories should have grown up around no historical centre whatever. In itself it seems probable enough that the purer Shemites of Chaldea resisted the drift of their Hamitic fellow-citizens into idolatry; that Abram distinguished himself by his zeal for the ancient worship of one living and true God; and that the hostility which such religious disputes awakened, possibly the sufferings or danger they entailed, had to do with the original removal of his father's household out of Chaldea.

If this deserve to be called by any better name than a plausible conjecture, it certainly offers an explanation for a step which the scriptural narrative has left unexplained. No reason is given why Abram or his father set out from Ur. We are not told that any intimation of the divine will had as yet reached either of them. Stephen, it is true, implies as much in his speech before the Sanhedrim. But his speech, as it stands, confounds Mesopotamia with Chaldea, and assigns what is probably a

false date for the death of Terah.[1] On such a question there is no occasion to ascribe to Stephen any higher authority than belongs to the current opinion of educated Jews in his day. The original text is altogether silent on the point, and the allusions in later Scripture are too slight and vacillating to be of weight.[2] On the whole, it may meet the evidence best, to say that the general migration of the family sprang out of circumstances which are now lost, but which were probably connected with the religious difficulties of the time; and that the specific call, by which God separated Abram and summoned him to exile, only reached him after the family movement had been arrested in Mesopotamia.

Haran, one of Terah's sons, had died before the removal. He had left, besides two daughters, a son, named Lot, to represent him. All these, with Abram, accompanied the head of the family. Nahor or Nachor alone, it is possible, remained behind till a later period, as his name is omitted from the list of emigrants (Gen. xi. 31). It must have been a regular clan march—the movement of a tribe, with all its slaves,

[1] See Acts vii. 2–4; 'Mesopotamia' in verse 2 should, of course, be Chaldea. Terah almost certainly survived Abram's migration for sixty years.

[2] Josh. xxiv. 3, 'I took your father Abraham from the *other side of the flood*,' seems to favour Haran as the scene of the earliest 'call' from God. Neh. ix. 7, 'God, who didst choose Abraham, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees,' rather looks the other way.

cattle, and household property. Slowly it must have moved up the stream from one camping-ground to another, as the supply of pasture or the friendliness of the natives suggested. It had been Terah's original intention to go on to Canaan; but when he reached the point at which he struck the main route for caravans intending to cross the great desert between Padan-Aram and Canaan, he, for some reason or other, abandoned that design. So long a journey was a serious undertaking. The region he had now reached was admirable grazing land. It seems to have been sufficiently clear of population to invite settlement. At all events he decided to arrest his further march, and settle down at a spot which lies some fifty miles east of the Euphrates, on the banks of the Belik, a small tributary stream. To keep up the memory of his deceased son, the new township was called after his name. Here Terah made for himself a second home. Here he continued, for over sixty years, to live as the head of a small pastoral clan; and here his son Nahor ruled after him.

II.

A CALL TO EMIGRATE.

YOUR FATHERS DWELT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FLOOD IN OLD TIME, EVEN TERAH, THE FATHER OF ABRAHAM, AND THE FATHER OF NACHOR: AND THEY SERVED OTHER GODS. AND I TOOK YOUR FATHER ABRAHAM FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FLOOD.

Josh. 24. 2

BY FAITH ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS CALLED TO GO OUT INTO A PLACE WHICH HE SHOULD AFTER RECEIVE FOR AN INHERITANCE, OBEYED; AND HE WENT OUT, NOT KNOWING WHITHER HE WENT.

Heb 11. 8

II.

A CALL TO EMIGRATE.

FOR nearly four centuries, at the briefest computation,[1]—for a period, that is, as long as has elapsed since the birth of Erasmus or of Martin

[1] Into the thorny questions of early biblical chronology I am not competent to venture. The discrepancy between the Hebrew original and the numerals of the Septuagint, however, does not seem to me the most serious source of uncertainty. We cannot be said to have yet ascertained on what principle the registers were constructed which trace the descent of the Hebrew people,—whether they are meant to be strictly genealogical; whether links are omitted; whether each link represents a generation; whether the names are always those of individuals or sometimes of clans. Till we are clear on such points, we lack a basis for a reliable chronology. The presumed difficulty in the received dates is to account within four centuries or so for the origin of so large a variety of races and tongues with fixed characteristics, and for the growth, at several distinct centres, of a well-matured civilisation. The latter difficulty seems an imaginary one, since, of course, the whole results of prediluvian civilisation passed over to the new world, and formed a stock to begin upon. The former is a more real one. Possibly its solution may lie in such considerations as the following, could we appreciate them fairly:—(1) That heads of families lived long enough to see their descendants multiply into a tribe, and were able in consequence to impress on them from the first a marked tribal character; (2) that the constant moving off of new stocks, in search of lands of their own, hindered intercourse and hastened the development of both ethnological and philological differences; and (3) that language was at a stage of very rapid development, and consequently of incessant change.

Luther,—the new race, saved from the flood, had been left to multiply and spread and corrupt itself, without anything that we know of, better than tradition, to keep alive a pure faith or the memory of God's past dealings with mankind. Like the four hundred years in Egypt, or the period of the Judges, or the interval from Malachi to John the Baptist, these centuries formed one of those longer pauses in the succession of divine communications to mankind, which have sometimes served to sharpen the ears of the few who did hearken for God's voice, as well as to accentuate that voice when it spoke again. A moment had arrived, however, when, for the sake of the divine purposes on man's behalf, it was requisite that some new and special revelation should be vouchsafed. When this interval of silence was over, two results of it were found to mark the condition of mankind. For one thing, the world was left broken up into states, tribes, and races, held well apart from one another, partly by variations of dialect, and partly by blood-affinities and repulsions. In the next place, a system of nature-worship, which tended rapidly to deify the chief forces and phenomena of matter, was found to have spread itself, though under varying forms, over all lands. The former of these facts made the separation of a single tribe, for the purpose of being divinely educated in re-

ligion, a possible step; the latter made it a needful one. The time was ripe for the interposition of Heaven, that in one sheltered and selected family at least might be unfolded an upward religious progress under supernatural impulses, to serve for a counterpoise or corrective to the downward movement everywhere else in progress. In a word, the beginnings must be made of a kingdom of God,[1] if more and more the kingdom of fallen spirits were not to be suffered without challenge to engulf humanity.

The voice of prophecy had already made selection of one out of the three main divisions of mankind to be the channel of such divine communications. 'Blessed be Jehovah,' Noah had said, in forecasting the future of his sons, '[Jehovah is] the God of Shem.'[2] Out of all the Semitic tribes, one man was now to be chosen. To his line direct revelation was henceforth to be confined. In his seed was to be enclosed a blessing which was destined to embrace mankind at last.

It is impossible not to feel that this narrowing down of the gracious contact of God with men to a single point was in certain respects a loss and a misfortune. It is equally easy to imagine that it had already become a necessity.

[1] With a true insight does Augustine, in his great work *De Civitate Dei*, trace its foundations back 'to the difference that arose among the angels' (xi. 1).

[2] Gen. ix. 26.

To save the embers of primeval truth, which were the world's religious hope, it might well be requisite to gather them together on one man's hearth. To gain intensity, breadth of area might have to be sacrificed. For a time the rest of the world must be left to go its own way: not indeed without God's care,—God forbid! nor even without some share in that Light which enlighteneth every man; yet without such supernatural and persistent teaching as was required to make one particular race the bearer of salvation to other families of the earth. Let it be remembered, at the same time, that in God's great plan, whatever is narrow, elective, or individual, contemplates in the long run a wider good. God is not the God of Shem only. For a time He was Shem's God in a peculiar sense, only that in the end both Japhet and Ham may partake in the blessing. God is not the God of Abraham alone; but He blessed Abraham in an eminent degree, that at last the blessing of Abraham might come on the nations through Jesus Christ. 'The mills of God grind slow,' but it is impossible to doubt that the most catholic results were contemplated from the very first in that segregation of a single man, which looked so partial or so narrow. To see this, it is enough to recall the terms in which God spoke when in Haran He called that 'man from the East:'—

'Get thee out of thy country,
and from thy kindred,
and from thy father's house,
Unto a land that I will show thee!
And I will make of thee a great nation;
And I will bless thee and make thy name great;
And thou shalt be a blessing;
And I will bless them that bless thee,
And I will curse him that curseth thee:
And in thee shall all families of the earth be
blessed!'[1]

These venerable words were like a charter to all generations of the Abrahamites. They lie at the foundation of the whole after history. Step by step their fulness of meaning came to be unrolled,—first, in the successive disclosures made to Abraham himself; next, in the long experience of his posterity. The wealth of blessing which lay folded up in this germ took more than two thousand years to ripen into fruit. But from the very first God left it in no doubt that, when the fruit of that chosen vine should at last be ripe, it should be for all nations. Jewish particularism might be turned, at a later day, into a narrow boast or a bitter bigotry and scorn of others; but in God's own primitive and gracious thought, Jewish particularism existed for the sake of Christian universalism. Like a rough rind, it guarded for a time the life and hope of all the world.

[1] Gen. xii. 1-3.

In the selection of men to be the organs or channels of His grace, God's freedom of choice never excludes some natural fitness in the person chosen. It is difficult for us to say how far the character of Abram, at the age of seventy-five, qualified him to receive this peculiar honour; for of his earlier life we know nothing, and his later character was of course profoundly coloured by this very 'call' itself. One circumstance, however, indicates that before God called him, Abram was already a man of more than ordinary religious principle. The divine communication was not all promise. God never promises without at the same time demanding. He deals with us as with sons, born in the image of His own free-will, able to give as well as to receive. The oracle opened, therefore, with a command to migrate. In return for what it promised, it called for a great sacrifice, it imposed a painful obedience. For the order to go out from Haran was unquestionably a hard one to obey. The reasons which had led his father to remove from Ur had ceased to operate. Room had been found, and quiet, and pasture. The causes which might have suggested a division of the clan did not obtain in his case. He was a childless man, and had no need to seek fresh settlements for his descendants. He had property enough where he was for all his simple wants. He was not

yet owner of such extensive flocks as to crowd his brother. The clan feeling was strong in his race; and to leave Haran meant to leave his father, now growing old, and his younger brother, in whose children lay the hope of the family, with everything which can make up home or country. To go anywhere, even to the most alluring territory, seemed in this instance a needless sacrifice of comfort. To travel without a purpose into a remote, unknown land beyond the desert; to leave home without knowing where to find a new one; to become a vagrant nomad, kithless and kinless;—this for a man without children, without ambition or lust of conquest, who had nothing to gain by emigrating, but everything to lose, seemed nothing short of folly.

When Abram, escorted by sorrowing relatives to the brink of the great 'flood,' did finally set his whole encampment across the Euphrates and turn his face to the dreaded desert, which stretched, wide and inhospitable, between him and the nearest seats of men, he gave his first evidence of that trust in the unseen Eternal One, leading to unquestioning, heroic obedience, which must even then have formed the basis of his character, and of which his later life was to furnish so many illustrious examples. '*By faith*,' is the comment of later Scripture, 'Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive

for an inheritance, *obeyed;* and he went out, not knowing whither he went.'[1]

The emigration of Abram, however, had other ends to serve besides testing his personal fitness to become the father of trustful and loyal souls.

For one thing, it was advisable to make a clean break in the continuity of his family history. Only in this way could he become really a fresh point of departure for the human race. Had he remained in Padan-Aram, Abram would have been simply one among his brethren, a sheikh of influence among neighbour sheikhs, a continuator of the Terah name, not the originator of a new epoch.

It was of still greater consequence to break him off from contact with the unwholesome influences which were already at work within his own family. Intercourse with the Chaldeans had clearly done this Shemite household no good. If Ur was even then the city of the moon-god, it is curious that Haran, too, became noted in far later times for its ancient and mystic moon-worship. Down even to the Christian era, it continued to be a centre of idolatrous heathenism to the neighbourhood.[2] The Book of Joshua uses language which might imply that Terah himself 'served other gods.'[3] Traces of images,

[1] Heb. xi. 8.
[2] Kalisch, *Commentary on Genesis*, pp. 322, 323.
[3] Josh. xiv. 2, 14.

which must have been employed either in household worship or for magical rites, are certainly found in the family of Terah's grandson.[1] The period was, religiously, one of transition. This family belonged to those who had longest preserved the name and spiritual worship of the true God, the memory of primeval revelation, and the primeval promise of salvation; but all around dwelt tribes that had surrendered themselves to polytheistic notions, to magic and idol rites. The poison of such a bad atmosphere had already infected the Terah connection. It was time, therefore, to break off this chosen man from ties which threatened to prove fatal to pure religion. At one point, at least, the declension of the best portion of humanity from God must be arrested, that on independent soil, and under new conditions, a fresh starting-point might be found for the religious development of the race. A new movement upward might have proved impossible, unless the head of it had been disengaged from hereditary associations, which were steadily dragging his race downward into the fetichism where all Hamitic religion has had its roots.

[1] These are the *teraphim* of Gen. xxxi. 19, 30, 34, which Laban calls his 'gods.' It is probable that Jacob's purging ordinance in xxxv. 2–4 referred to them. Ezek. xxi. 21 refers to the same objects as used in Babylonian divination. Their origin was therefore in all likelihood Chaldean.

On the other hand, nothing could better serve to purify and strengthen the religious life of Abram himself, than this final renunciation of home. To withdraw into a strange land, meant the abandonment of himself to the guidance of God alone. True piety, in its more masculine and self-conscious stages, always involves some such renunciation of natural supports. It does not always require a literal separation from home or friends, but it does require the withdrawal of the heart's deepest dependence from earthly props or ministers, in order to rest in a self-contained and unaided trust upon the Unseen Arm. Abram's emigration teaches by example precisely the same profound and universal lesson of spiritual life which Jesus taught in words: 'Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.'[1] St. Francis of Assisi, and many like him, have read this evangelical call to renounce the world too literally. Nevertheless, if we would choose and pursue the heavenly country to which God is calling us, there must be in the heart of each of us a virtual leaving of father and mother, a forsaking of all that we have, in order to be Christ's followers. Of this we have the first great type in the emigration of Abram. Besides, God cut him off from kindred that He might draw him closer to Himself. If renunciation for God's

[1] Luke xiv. 33.

sake be the condition of strong piety, solitary converse with God is its nurse. Emigration often does a great deal for a man. By throwing him back for aid upon his own resources, it teaches him to help himself, and developes the manhood that is in him. The emigration of a godly man at God's call does still more for him. It forces him to lean much on God, Who becomes his only constant comrade and unfailing helper. It throws him back at each emergency upon the spiritual resources of faith, and trains into full maturity the graces of his religious nature. Inwardly, Abram could hardly have become the spiritual hero he was in later life, if he had not been forced to walk through the long trials of his exile with nothing but the unseen eternal God for his 'shield,' and compelled to brood through homeless years over the mighty thoughts which God had uttered to his faith.

It was thus one of the great moments of history when that primitive caravan of shepherds set out from Haran. A single man and his childless wife set out together upon a strange quest. They sought a land, they knew not where; they sought a seed, they knew not how; they sought a blessing, they knew not what. One only of their kindred, an orphan nephew, clave to their fortunes. With them they carried

all they had — household gear piled on the camels' backs, and household bondsmen tending the droves of cattle. As we dimly picture their setting forth in that pale dawn of history, we seem to see the laden camels, pacing slowly, towering over the slow-footed sheep; we hear the drovers' cries and bleating of the flocks, broken by the wail of parting women; grave men, too, sobbing on each other's necks. With those who stay behind, we strain wistful eyes across the broad flood of old Euphrates, till on the wilderness beyond, the caravan is lost in a faint dust-haze—a stain and no more on the southern horizon. Who does not feel that the grandeur of that moment centres in the loyalty of one human soul to one word of God? Lot had surely but small sympathy with the deeper motives for this journey. The slave retinue had none at all. Even Sarai, chieftain's daughter and wife as she was, was of weak faith beside her husband. It may be she bent over her camel's neck to weep at that supreme hour of parting, with a misgiving heart and a longing after all to stay. Small blame to her if she did. Only one man there had heard God speak. To him that voice of God, heard once, and perchance no more than once, was the law of duty, to be followed at every hazard and to the earth's end—followed with a child's simplicity and a hero's daring. The world has witnessed

many an emigration since, but none more grand than that, none so fruitful. Yet to any humble believer in the God of Abraham, it may be given to do just such a deed,—to abandon earthly comforts and let earth's loves go, that in doing homely duty God's will may be done. Nay, we shall every one of us be 'called' one day to do a deed harder even than his. Have we not to bid adieu to kindred and father's house, that we may go on a more solitary journey, across a more awful flood, to a more unknown land? The strength in which this too has to be done, where shall it be found but in this,—that we have heard God tell us how for us also He has prepared a better country, even an heavenly?

III.

THE LAND OF PROMISE.

A GOOD LAND, A LAND OF BROOKS OF WATER, OF FOUNTAINS AND DEPTHS THAT SPRING OUT OF VALLEYS AND HILLS ; A LAND OF WHEAT, AND BARLEY, AND VINES, AND FIG TREES, AND POMEGRANATES ; A LAND OF OIL OLIVE, AND HONEY ; A LAND WHEREIN THOU SHALT EAT BREAD WITHOUT SCARCENESS. Deut 8 7,8,9.

A LAND WHICH THE LORD THY GOD CARETH FOR: THE EYES OF THE LORD THY GOD ARE ALWAYS UPON IT, FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE YEAR. Deut 11.12

THE HITTITES AND THE JEBUSITES AND THE AMORITES DWELL IN THE MOUNTAINS ; AND THE CANAANITES DWELL BY THE SEA AND BY THE COAST OF JORDAN.

III.

THE LAND OF PROMISE.

WHERE his future home was to be found Abram seems not to have known when he set out. He simply resumed the interrupted march of his father's house, which, on leaving Ur, had contemplated Canaan as its destination. Towards Canaan, therefore, he turned his face. His route lay southwards, or more exactly a little west of south. It was a tedious as well as toilsome journey, through a region singularly waste and void of population. Two generations later, Laban, pursuing his nephew by forced marches, took a week to overtake him at Gilead. Abram must have moved far more slowly, for he was at the head of a household caravan, encumbered with herds and flocks. At one point on the route, and one only, was it possible for him to halt for any length of time, and at that point he has left traces of his presence. In all the upland desert which stretches betwixt Palestine and the Upper Euphrates, Damascus was the only spot where

we know he must have found a resident population. Even at that early date, the lovely oasis where the waters of the Barada, descending from Anti-Lebanon, create a paradise at its foot, had attracted settlers. History and legend have preserved to this day the memory of the great emigrant's connection with the most venerable and unchanged of cities. Josephus relates, on the authority of a Damascene historian of earlier date,[1] that 'the name of Abram is even still famous in the country of Damascus, and there is shown a village named from him, *the habitation of Abram.*' It is certainly a curious instance of the tenacity of Eastern names, that about a mile and a half from the northern gate of the city there should be found a pretty little village, where one of the most recent writers on Syria, Mrs. Burton, tells us that Arab tradition still places 'the habitation of Abraham,' exactly as in the days of Nicolaus, whom Josephus cites.[2] That he came to Damascus as a conqueror, and reigned over it as a king,[3] are details which may be as unhistorical as the stories about Nimrod condemning him to a fiery furnace in Babylon. In the sober record of Genesis, however, one little link is preserved which has been supposed to connect him with

[1] Josephus, *Ant.* i. 7. 2.

[2] *Inner Life of Syria*, by Mrs. Burton, i. 140.

[3] The fourth of its kings, according to the tradition preserved by Justin (36. 2. 3) in the second century.

the place. A few years later, we find that the slave who stood at the head of his household with the right of inheritance is styled 'Elezier of Damascus,' at least if the rendering which has hitherto been usual can be accepted.[1] But even if Eliezer (whose name indicates a Semitic origin, like his master's) be characterised in these words as of Damascene origin, which is doubtful, he was most likely a home-born slave, in which case he could not have been acquired during Abram's visit to that city only a few years before. There is no doubt, at all events, that Damascus on the north, like Hebron on the south, is an enduring link to bind the present with those far-off days, when the father of the faithful was a stranger in the land.

The wanderer's first halt within the limits of the promised territory was in the very centre of Canaan. Sichem or Shechem, now Nablûs, was an early seat of population. It formed a natural gathering-place for the Hivite tribes. Under its great oak, famous for centuries after, was a consecrated place of heathen worship. It is probable, however, that no town existed there at the date of Abram's arrival. For the town which bore the name of that young Hivite chieftain whose love for Jacob's daughter led

[1] So the English Version reads in Gen. xv. 2. There are linguistic difficulties in this sense; see Tuch *in loc.* Kalisch (*Genesis*, p. 363) reads both words as a compound proper name: 'Dammesek Eliezer.'

to such disastrous issues, was probably founded only in the days of Shechem's father, who, of course, was contemporary with Jacob.[1] Here, then, the exile encamped on open unoccupied soil. Here, at the foot of Ebal and Gerizim, in the holy heart of the land, he received from God his earliest intimation that this was the destined home of his future seed—the land in search of which he had travelled so far. Under the branches of that sacred tree, which, after looking down on the cruel and impure rites of many more generations, was still to stand, a venerable landmark in the eyes of his conquering descendants, Abram reared his first rude altar to Jehovah on the soil of Canaan. It was his response to God's word: 'Unto thy seed will I give this land.' It expressed both confidence and gratitude. It was his way of taking the country in possession. It was the first step in that long cleansing of the soil, which was ultimately to turn the polluted Canaan into a holy land for God's redeemed.

Every thoughtful student of Bible history will recognise, in the geographical position of Palestine, certain conditions which eminently fitted it for the purpose to which its Maker destined it. Not by accident did that strip of Syrian

[1] Gen. xii. 6, xxxiii. 18; Judg. ix. 6. The word rendered 'plain' in the English Version, should be 'oak.'

territory become the theatre of sacred events, the home of the covenant people, and the seat of divine revelation. There was no other region on the earth's surface which could have answered so well.

The first feature which eminently marked out the land for the residence of God's chosen nation is this: it unites, as no other does, the two indispensable conditions of central position and yet of isolation. To lie in the midst of the nations, at the focus and gathering-place of those mighty and cultured empires, whose rivalries ruled the politics, as their example led the civilisation, of antiquity, yet at the same time be shut off from such contact with them as must of necessity prove injurious, seemed to be opposite requirements, very hard to be reconciled. To a curious extent they are reconciled in the land of promise. It lies at a corner where Asia, Africa, and Europe meet, or all but touch. The six ancient states of Babylon, Assyria, Media, Persia, Phœnicia, and Egypt stood round about it. The main lines of ancient traffic ran close past its border. Whenever, for purposes of war or trade, bodies of men sought to pass from the populous and powerful states of the north, whose centre lay along the Euphrates, to the populous and powerful states of the south, whose centre lay along the Nile, there was only one road by which they could travel. 'Syria,

says a famous modern geographer, 'is bounded by a great sea of sand on the east, as by a great sea of water on the west. Across that natural barrier of sea and sand, there is but one convenient highway.' Palestine is like 'a bridge arching across a double sea of desert sands and of waters which the want of harbours made useless to it. It connected the Euphrates with the Nile.' While thus set in the middle of all lands, it stood strangely apart from all. 'No great highway,' says the same authority, 'led through it from nation to nation; all went by it, over the roads which skirted it without traversing it; and which all found their type in the sea-line which ran from the harbours of the ancient Phœnician cities to Egypt, along a shore which was almost devoid of havens.' In fact, it was so isolated, that if its people chose they could dwell apart. On the west, a harbourless coast; on the north, great mountain ranges; on the east and south, vast waterless wastes; yet alongside it, and close by its very borders, there must pass, by fatiguing and hazardous journeys, the long caravans or laden ships which carried traffic from one civilised state to another, and the cumbrous armies by which rival empires sought to crush each other. Geographically, politically, commercially, 'no country is so situated in relation to three great continents and five great bodies of water; none unites such

amazing contrasts,—perfect isolation and independence, with the ability to go out from this isolation and establish relations with all the greatest nations of antiquity.'[1]

Another characteristic which qualified Palestine to be a training-ground for the Hebrews was this, that it combined to an unusual degree high agricultural fertility with exposure to sudden and severe disasters. In most years, it could sustain a dense population of cultivators, supposing them to be industrious and frugal, without any excessive or grinding toil. Enough, not always for export, but for home consumption at least, its well-watered valleys and vine-clad hills could furnish in ordinary seasons. For comfortable sustenance, therefore, though not for wealth or luxury, such a nation of peasants was sufficiently provided within its own borders. It could dwell apart, yet experience no want. At the same time, the people were kept in close dependence for the fruits of harvest upon the bounty of Providence. Their proximity to a desert on one side exposed the land to calamities of various kinds. A deficient rainfall, or the prevalence of hot winds from the south and east, might entail a total failure in the crops. Flights of locusts might strip the fields bare before they were reaped, or predatory

[1] Carl Ritter, *The Comparative Geography of Palestine and the Sinaitic Peninsula*, translated by Gage (T. & T. Clark), ii. 7–10.

bands of Bedawin pillage the granaries of the peasantry under the eyes of a feeble government. The land lay along an ancient axis of volcanic action, and has been, within the historic period, visited again and again by earthquakes. To this day these are still the occasional plagues of Southern Syria; and so long as it was peopled by a race whose national annals constituted one long providential discipline, all such forms of disaster, like arrows in the Almighty's quiver, lay ready to be employed for the chastisement of His wayward and indocile people.

To these advantages for its special design, this perhaps ought to be added, that hardly any regions offer so few temptations to corrupt the simplicity of their inhabitants, or better facilities for the defence of their liberties. Destitute of good harbours (for Tyre was always in foreign hands) or of a navigable river, Palestine never could have become an important mercantile power. The attempts which were made with this view, under its most prosperous sovereign, depended, for any success they enjoyed, on its foreign conquests on the shores of the Red Sea; and they had no permanent success. Western Palestine always has been, and always must be, a land of agriculturists on a small scale; specially of vignerons and oil-growers. But for a hardy race of peasants, lead-

ing a simple life from father to son, and congregated in small village communities, it formed a safe and easily defended home. In the caves with which its limestone hills are honeycombed, and in the rocky fastnesses which command the passes leading from the flat border on all sides up into the heart of the land, a small, brave people could hold their own against superior force, and by guerilla warfare could wear out, as its patriotic sons more than once proved, the efforts of trained armies.

When all these considerations are combined, it may be fairly said that the selection of Canaan to be the future heritage of Abram's seed was not a result of caprice or accident, but the carrying out of a plan which was foreseen by the divine wisdom when God laid the foundations of its hills and scooped out its fertile water-courses.

To realize the condition of the land of Canaan in the days of Abram's immigration, it is necessary to rid oneself of certain associations which are derived from later times. Some six or seven hundred years afterwards, his descendants returned to it as conquerors. They found it occupied by a very strong population. A crowd of warlike tribes, capable of forming leagues for common defence, covered its surface with their habitations, held its numerous fortified towns,

and swept its plains with chariots. The conquest of these tribes, even under the enthusiasm of a divine commission and with the aid of divine interposition, cost Joshua several pitched battles, with the siege of a long list of cities. But six or seven hundred years constitute a considerable period in the growth of nations. Between the time of Abram and that of Joshua Canaan had materially changed. Already, indeed, the Canaanite was in the land on the arrival of the first Hebrew immigrant. Already, too, the population comprised under this general name of Canaanite was enfeebled by that inveterate subdivision into clans and septs, without national cohesion or a common policy, which has been the weakness of most Hamitic races. From various indications, however, it is clear that the population was still sparse, the townships or seats of settled residence few, and the soil in consequence very partially under cultivation. Of towns we only find the names of Hebron or Mamre, Salem, Gerar (if it was a town), Luz, and En-mishpat, with the 'cities' of the Jordan circle. So open was the face of the country, that Abram found no hindrance to his pasturing extensive flocks both in the centre and in the south. Of the native tribes, as many as ten are enumerated in one passage;[1] but

[1] Gen. xv. 19–21. The same names recur, though in reduced numbers, in Ex. iii., xiii., and xxiii. 23, as well as in Deut. vii. In

they were mere subdivisions of a single stock. Separately, they must have been of small size. There was plainly room for all. They lived amicably side by side, as men do who have elbow-room. Nor do we read of those interminable feuds with one another, to which such a state of society gives birth so soon as population grows dense in proportion to the power of the soil to sustain it. So small were these petty clans, that Abram's muster of three hundred and eighteen fighting men made him on one occasion the head of a Hittite league. Single-handed, he commanded a force with which Philistine chieftains did not disdain to treat, courting his alliance. No less indicative of a thin and primitive population are the local proper names. Places were still designated from conspicuous natural objects, especially large trees. We have spoken of the oak or terebinth at Sichem. Under another tree of the same species was Rachel buried; and a grove of them sheltered the tents of Abram at Mamre. The felling of palms gave its name to Hazazon-Tamar, and a tamarisk of Abram's planting marked the site of Beersheba. For the most part, too, such natural objects are called after the settler who had chosen them for his place of residence, as the oak of Moreh; while in

Ex. xxiii. 28, the subdivisions appear finally as grouped under the three main tribes of Hivite, Canaanite, and Hittite.

several instances the nomenclature is so new, that they bear the names of chiefs who figure in the narrative; Eshcol, for example, and Mamre.

These Canaanitish tribes were themselves immigrants, who at some earlier date had dispossessed or subdued the ruder aborigines. Traces of a prior population lingered long among them—down to the reign of David, or even later. Such were the so-called Rephaim, or men of gigantic stature, and the Horites, the troglodytes or cave-dwellers of Mount Seir, whom Esau expelled. The Canaanites must have introduced a higher civilisation and a more settled style of life. They were builders of towns and tillers of the field. They gathered thickest where the soil was most fertile. They were traffickers, too, as some scholars take their very name to denote. They knew the use of a medium of exchange. They already transacted business, settled bargains, and enforced justice, after a fashion which became usual in the East, in the void space before the city gate, as the place of most public concourse.

Hand in hand with such a state of comparative civilisation went moral and religious deterioration. It is true that 'the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full;'[1] of the warlike clans, that is, who held the backbone of hill

[1] Gen. xv. 16.

country in the middle of the land. To this less corrupt division belonged the three Hittite chieftains whose friendship Abram afterwards contracted. But the instance of Sodom and its sister towns reveals the condition into which the Canaanites proper had already sunk, the lowland tribes who had occupied the valley of the lower Jordan on the east of that mountain ridge, and the sea-coast plain on the west of it. To this result the tropical luxuriance of the Jordan and the maritime traffic of the Levant had no doubt contributed. 'Fulness of bread and abundance of idleness'[1] had led to the enervation and vicious laxity of all pampered communities. Of all these tribes alike, however, the religious system was, so far as later evidence permits a conclusion, essentially demoralizing. Though less developed, it is supposed to have been nearly identical in its main features with that of the later Phœnician kingdom, which proved so fascinating and corrupting to the Jews of Solomon's day, as well as to those of Ahab's. If so, it was a worship of the heavenly bodies, resting on a pantheistic deification of the productive powers in nature. It required human blood and the immolation of children by fire. At this early period it is not believed to have sanctioned such gross licentiousness in the sacred groves as stained the

[1] Ezek. xvi. 49.

rites of Baal-peor, the divinity of Moab, when the Israelites entered Canaan. Still, no one who is familiar with the Old Testament needs to be told what cruel and impure things must have been done among the devotees of Molech and Ashtaroth.[1] In fact, the religion of Canaan was probably very similar in its spirit to that which Abram had left behind him in his native Chaldea. It involved the same elevation of natural forces into the place of nature's Maker and Ruler, against which the life of Abram had been a struggle and his migration an open protest.

[1] The name of this goddess already occurs in the compound name of a place east of the Jordan, Ashteroth-Karnaim = 'Two-horned Asteroth,' Gen. xiv. 5.

IV.

THE ALTAR AND THE TENT.

BY FAITH HE SOJOURNED IN THE LAND OF PROMISE AS IN A STRANGE COUNTRY, DWELLING IN TABERNACLES. Heb 11 9.

THERE BUILDED HE AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, WHO APPEARED UNTO HIM. Gen 12 7

TRULY IF THEY HAD BEEN MINDFUL OF THAT COUNTRY FROM WHENCE THEY CAME OUT, THEY MIGHT HAVE HAD OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE RETURNED. BUT NOW THEY DESIRE A BETTER COUNTRY, THAT IS, AN HEAVENLY. WHEREFORE GOD IS NOT ASHAMED TO BE CALLED THEIR GOD, FOR HE HATH PREPARED FOR THEM A CITY. Heb 11 15.

IV.

THE ALTAR AND THE TENT.

IT is in his antagonism to the native religions of Canaan that we must find a key to the position which Abram was henceforth to occupy in the land. As a worshipper of one God Most High, possessor of earth and heaven, he had been selected and called, not to become the apostle of a new revelation, but rather to conserve an ancient though decaying faith, and hand it down to a line of monotheistic descendants, among whom it might be guarded from corruption or extinction. In Chaldea, his attitude had been that of a protestant who refuses to conform to the sensuous and arrogant state-religion which had obtained ascendancy. It was in search of religious freedom he had forsaken his fatherland. He desired to find a place where, in peace and unmolested, he might practise the simple rites of his ancestral worship —rearing his altar beneath the open sky, and

offering to the eternal and almighty Lord the appointed sacrifices from his flock. This he found leave to do in the thinly-peopled highlands of Canaan, if not within its populous Sodoms. For a wandering flock-master there was still free pasturage on the unenclosed lands. Still he could pitch his tents by the side of the agricultural settler, neither molesting nor molested. Society in Canaan was too loosely articulated to oppose the intrusion of a stranger clan, or to limit its rights. In Chaldea, a denser and more advanced community had been welded by Nimrod and his immediate successors into one well-knit empire, where the ruling race gave law to the ruled, and in religion, as in everything else, the monarch tolerated no dissent. Whereas, among the independent tribes of Canaan, there was freedom because there was room.

As years went on and population grew, this nomad shepherd-life was destined to become less easy. The tent-men with their cattle naturally got crowded out through the gradual clearing and occupation of what Australians call 'the bush.' It is for this reason that Abram, his son, and his grandson are found to push farther and farther south. He himself moved from Sichem to Mamre, and from Mamre to Beersheba. Isaac found even the Beersheba pastures too confined to hold his own flocks and

those of his neighbours. He retreated to the Well of Lahai-roi, in the extreme south. The sons of Jacob were fain to scour the country in search of pasture as far north as Dothan. The migration into Egypt formed only the last step in this process. It is thus that, when population is becoming fixed, the pastoral and patriarchal stage of society dies a natural death. As yet, however, we have to conceive of Abram as free to shift his black haircloth tents and spreading herds from spot to spot over the face of the country; and free, wherever he encamped, to erect his altar and worship the God of his fathers, as Abel worshipped, with innocent blood, the first-fruits of his simple sheep.

Another peculiarity of Abram's position in Canaan, which lasted also through the lives of his son and grandson, was the contrast which obtained betwixt his territorial rights and his enjoyment of them.

By the gift or promise of One to Whom all lands belong, that land was his from one end of it to the other; in actual possession he could not call a foot of it his own. To a position so unusual as this he was required to accommodate his conduct. Until it pleased God by His providence to put him in peaceable possession of the soil, Abram had to reconcile himself to

seeing it in other hands. To this extent it remained to him a foreign land, and he had to be content to be 'a stranger and a sojourner' in it. Not even on the single occasion when his sword had without his own design placed some of its 'goods' at his disposal, would he accept 'from a thread even to a sandal thong,' lest the Canaanite should boast that he had made Abram rich.[1] The very grave which he was compelled to procure for his dead, he insisted upon paying for at its full market value.[2] Whatever he got, he would get straight from God, and from God alone. The yearly grass that sprang on unenclosed lands was free to every comer. The wells which he himself had dug were his to use by the law of the desert. The increase of his cattle was God's gift. But for the rest, the Promiser must fulfil His own promise. It was not for Abram to antedate its fulfilment, or grasp prematurely at that which sacred words had destined for his race.

On the other hand, while thus acquiring no interest in the soil, he felt bound not to leave it. Save once, when, pressed by hunger, he went down to Egypt and again to Gerar, Abram never moved beyond the boundary which God had marked out. Rather than suffer his son to leave it, he sent to Padan-Aram to fetch home a bride for him.[3] So far as he could, he made

[1] Gen. xiv. 23. [2] Gen. xxiii. 8-16. [3] Gen. xxiv. 7. 8.

it his home. He clung to it as to the heritage which God's favour had called him to inherit. Nor is it doubtful that this constituted a serious trial. In men of his race the family tie has always been unusually strong. In his day, too, each petty sept or tribelet seems to have stuck together, intermarrying, retaining its own fashions, and mixing little with its neighbours. At the best, therefore, it would have been a trying thing for such a man to dwell alone among people of strange blood, so far from the tents of his kinsmen that intercourse was quite cut off. The religious gulf which, as we have seen, severed him from his neighbours, made his position still more lonely. From their tribal gatherings he was forced to hold himself aloof; for under the sacred gathering-tree were always celebrated odious and forbidden rites. Even the necessary relationships of hospitality and good-neighbourhood required to be guarded, lest they should prove a snare. Wherever he went, he had to rear an altar of his own. His children and his household must be charged to 'keep the way of Jehovah,'[1] shunning every avoidable alliance with the natives as an entanglement or a defilement. Such marked isolation was of course invidious, and in some respects painful. Yet it was maintained, by no constraint but that of his free choice, for

[1] Gen. xviii. 19.

exactly a century. He had been a man of seventy-five when he left Haran. He was an hundred and seventy-five when in Canaan he closed his eyes. Through all that long interval had it been literally true of him, that 'if he had been mindful of the country from whence he came out, he might have had opportunity to return.'[1] There was nothing to forbid a return. True, he grew rich in Canaan; but the pastures of Haran were as good, and he as well as his grandson might have grown rich there also. True, he enjoyed in Canaan the consideration due to a powerful emir, but at home he would have been a still more honoured chief over a larger tribe of clansmen. It was only the unfulfilled promise which held him fast. 'This land will I give,' God had said. So in 'this land' he waited, and waiting died.

Now, of such an exceptional position, Abram's tent was, so to say, the symbol. Because he owned no territory, he built no fixed dwelling. Altars he erected, but no house. To the last he would not abandon the nomad life which he had adopted, not of choice, but by necessity, nor exchange the encampment for a 'city of habitation,' simply because to the last he remained, as he said, 'a stranger and a sojourner' among the people of the land.[2] Whether the patriarch knew it or not, God had in a better sense 'pre-

[1] Heb. xi. 15. [2] Gen. xxiii. 4.

pared for him a city.'[1] It was not to be some greater Hebron; not another Salem on earth, with ampler edifices than adorned, or more stable bulwarks than defended, Melchizedek's 'city of peace.' No; but that eternal dwelling-place of all pious, self-denying souls, whose architect and builder is God Himself. Consciously or unconsciously (for who can tell in how far off a future the hopes of this man might rest?), the dwelling which Abram did really wait his hundred years to inherit was no other than what one of his late posterity, Philo of Alexandria, calls 'the city of God, fair and populous, and exceeding full of felicity, whereof all good and godly men are the citizens, for in it they have their real home.' It is the abnegation of earthly treasures to follow God which constitutes citizenship in heaven. This is to be a stranger here. This is to feel like a sojourner in a tent, who has but the slenderest possible hold on the ground, and is ever ready to arise and depart, for this is not his rest. In such a spirit as this may we all spend our days! We, too, may have our earthly Harans to forsake; our blood-ties possibly to renounce for Christ; certainly our Sodoms to refuse. For all men it is a temptation to be withstood, the longing to build here as for a permanent home, into which we may gather the treasures that we

[1] Heb. xi. 16.

love the best. For all men it is true, that not till 'the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved,' will they find a 'building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'[1]

[1] 2 Cor. v. 1.

V.

WANDERINGS.

WHEN THERE WERE BUT A FEW MEN IN NUMBER, 1 Chr. 16. 19 20 21
  YEA, VERY FEW, AND STRANGERS IN IT;
WHEN THEY WENT FROM ONE NATION TO ANOTHER,
  FROM ONE KINGDOM TO ANOTHER PEOPLE;
HE SUFFERED NO MAN TO DO THEM WRONG,
  YEA, HE REPROVED KINGS FOR THEIR SAKES:
'TOUCH NOT MINE ANOINTED,
  AND DO MY PROPHETS NO HARM.'

V.

WANDERINGS.

FROM the vale of Shechem, which had been his first halting-place, Abram moved ere long to more open quarters on the hills to the south of it. The place is described as lying between Bethel and Ai. Bethel, as a name and as a town, is of course of later date, but close beside it stood the native town of Luz or Luzah,[1] which may have been a Hittite settlement as early as Abram. Its whole history, however, is extremely obscure. Ai (or, with the article, Hai, 'the heap') was a royal city of the Canaanites till its total destruction by Joshua's army;[2] but here again we can only conjecture that its foundation may have been anterior to Abram's arrival. Between these two sites, at any rate, there lay then, as there lies now, a 'high and beautiful plain,' which Robinson describes as 'one of the finest tracts for pasturage in the whole land.'[3] It is over-

[1] Gen. xxviii. 19; Judg. i. 23. [2] Josh. viii.
[3] Robinson's *Biblical Researches*, i. pp. 450, 575.

looked by the hill on which Abram built his second altar, to form a sanctuary for his wide encampment. A rugged and difficult country stretches around; and the position proved so secure, as well as suitable for his purpose, that after a year of scarcity had forced him into Egypt, Abram returned again to the same camping-ground.[1]

When the heavy rains fail which are due in November and December, the crops of Syria get burnt up by the sun's heat before harvest-time, and the herbage which ought to clothe the pastoral wilderness, and furnish food for flocks, is either very scanty or wholly absent. Such a season befell soon after Abram entered Canaan. The land, for the sake of which he had forsaken fertile Mesopotamia, became unable to sustain his household, or to feed the comparatively small flocks which at that time composed his fortune. In this first serious trial, the new emigrant does not appear to have either asked or received counsel from Heaven. Acting on his own discretion, he went down, like many of his posterity in similar straits, to Egypt. Occasionally, it is true, even Egypt shared in a general dearth,—as, for example, in Joseph's time. For the most part, however, its mysterious river brought from those great reservoirs

[1] Gen. xiii. 1–3.

of Central Africa an annual irrigation which rendered it largely independent of rainfall, and lent to it such prodigious fertility, that it has been throughout history a grain-exporting country. Abram's visit to Lower Egypt is the first in a long series of similar incidents in the annals of his race, of which the last was the escape thither of his divine descendant, the persecuted Infant. What a stretch of time lay between these two flights! How many centuries separate us even from the later of the two! Yet across all these millenniums lies this land of mystery and superstition, like a link to bind history together. Egypt is the key to the politics of the East to-day, just as it was four thousand years ago. It was already the foremost state in the world. Peopled by the same race which in Chaldea had made such early advances in arts and polity, it already possessed a venerable history. Successive dynasties of Pharaohs had governed it. It had sent out its colonies to the north and to the east. It was ruled by a semi-deified monarch, whose sway reposed on a compact and mighty priesthood. Its religion was a low and superstitious nature-worship, addicted to magic, and only redeemed from corruption by the clearness with which it proclaimed two great moral doctrines,—immortality, and a rigorous distribution of rewards and punishments in a future life.

It was not without some natural misgivings that Abram could set his face to enter such a land. Born among a similar race, he well knew their evil ways. Besides, he was too powerful a man to escape attention. Notwithstanding the traditional jealousy of Egyptians for the foreigner, we find that from his arrival he associated with the nobles, while the reigning sovereign proposed to become allied with him by marriage. Our knowledge of the comparative chronology of Egypt is too uncertain for us to say with confidence under what dynasty this visit occurred.[1] It is, therefore, a precarious explanation of this friendly reception of the Hebrew which has been sought for in the rule of the Hyksos or Shepherd-kings over Lower Egypt. Whoever may have for the moment held sway, the fears of Abram were such as might be suggested by the native Egyptian character. As a people, they were known indeed to be respectful to women; at the same time they were sensual and uxorious. Their monarch was a polygamist, and kept a harem. At this time, Sarai was a woman between sixty-five and seventy years of age. Only, people lived so much longer then, that it is conceivable the bloom of her matronly prime

[1] In the essay 'On the Bearings of Egyptian History upon the Pentateuch,' which Canon Cook has affixed to the first volume of the *Speaker's Commentary*, will be found one of the most recent and careful discussions of this difficult, and as yet unsettled problem.

might not yet be past. She had been a very beautiful woman, and the Egyptian females were noted for the want of beauty. She was of fair complexion, and they were dark-skinned. The apprehensions of her husband may be excused, for they were in part at least justified by the result. To him it appeared probable, that if Sarai were acknowledged as his wife, his own life might be sacrificed to the desire of some Egyptian magnate to possess her, since only by the husband's death could she be set free to contract a fresh alliance; and our knowledge of the time does not enable us to affirm that such apprehensions were exaggerated. At the same time, there is no occasion to deny, as certain apologists have unwisely done, the guilt of the patriarch's cowardice and falsehood. To call his wife his sister was a falsehood, although in the letter it was half a truth, for it was a suppression of the essential fact with a design to deceive. It was dictated by such a timorous concern for his personal safety as implied distrust in the protection of God. It did a cruel wrong to his wife, for it exposed her to the most serious of all hazards. It even placed in jeopardy the purity of the promised 'seed,' of which God had already spoken to him. No defence can be offered for a man who, merely through dread of danger to himself, tells a lie, risks his wife's chastity, puts temptation in the

way of his neighbours, and betrays the charge to which the divine favour has summoned him. Not even the excuse can be offered of a sudden impulse, for the scheme was pre-arranged between husband and wife before they entered Egypt.[1] Even after this lesson, it was repeated under analogous circumstances some twenty years afterwards. It was too faithfully imitated by his feebler son.[2] When all this is considered, it will perhaps be judged that the moral strength of this great man lay in his power of yielding an implicit obedience to direct instructions from Heaven; whereas when these failed him, so that he was left to his unguided impulses, he showed himself by no means uniformly strong or true. Such occasions, indeed, were of rare occurrence; but on these occasions he did betray a certain cowardly craftiness, which runs, like a discreditable strain, through the blood of his posterity. Deceit, in order to gain a point or to avert a disaster, is to this day an inveterate habit with most Orientals; and in the best times of Israel, men otherwise of lofty character are found succumbing to this dastardly vice. The tendency evidently lay deep in the race from its first appearance. Abram's relatives in Haran—Laban, for example, and his sister—were fond of manœuvring. In Jacob it was much more pronounced than in either his

[1] Gen. xx. 13. [2] Gen. xxvi. 7.

father or grandfather. His sons, too, lied shamefully. Joseph himself was not without the family fondness for underhand tricks. Even David was in this a genuine Hebrew ; while examples of it among meaner men are plentiful enough. God did not select this race to be the medium of His revelations to mankind because they were by nature more noble or more generous than surrounding nations. With strong religious instincts, indeed, they were certainly endowed,—with a faculty for apprehending, and surrendering themselves to, the voice of the Eternal. Of this their great progenitor was the typical instance; and the characteristic descended to the race. But of those lofty virtues which actually came to bloom on Hebrew soil, the greater part were the fruit of Heaven's culture rather than of indigenous goodness. They were products, not of nature, but of grace.

Some interposition for the protection of Sarai was necessary, if the divine purposes with her and her husband were to be carried out. Its object was not simply to attest the sanctity of wedlock; it was to save from wrong the future mother of Isaac. It is not easy to see by what loophole Abram himself could expect to escape from the critical position into which his sin had brought him. But God had been pleased to select this man, erring and weak as he might be, for public ends. Through him He chose to

convey His gracious purposes to mankind. He destined his child to be the heir of the promise of salvation, and the human ancestor of His own incarnate Son. For the sake of such lofty designs, as well as out of regard to the prophetic office with which He had clothed His servant, no man must be suffered to do him wrong; even kings must be reproved for his sake.[1]

> 'Touch not Mine anointed,
> And do My prophet no harm,'

was substantially the warning sent to Pharaoh. But it reached the heathen mind of the monarch in a way accommodated to his heathen notions. Pharaoh had taken the fair Syrian to his harem with a view to honourable marriage. The prescribed term of preparation for the espousals was still running its course, when some undescribed disease affected the royal household, and probably impeded by its very nature the consummation of the nuptials. To a devout, superstitious Egyptian, every physical evil has some specific moral origin: the court priests had no difficulty in tracing this malady to the presence of the foreign lady. They reasoned precisely as Jonah's shipmates did on a parallel occasion.[2] Like the ship-men, too, Pharaoh questioned the stranger as to the hidden reason for the anger of the immortal

[1] Ps. cv. 13–15. [2] Jonah i. 7.

gods. It is certain that the king would be neither startled nor scandalized, supposing he learnt from Abram the exact fact that he had wedded his half-sister.[1] Such alliances were not merely tolerated by the laws of Egypt, they were sanctioned by the example of the deities in the Egyptian mythology.[2] Men still stood too near the second origin of the race from a single home, for the laws of incest to have become fixed with the precision of later times. What Pharaoh resented was the deceit by which he had been nearly betrayed into the unintentional commission of a great crime; and his forbearance under such provocation offers a singular contrast both to the behaviour of the 'prophet' and to that which the 'prophet' anticipated from his pagan hosts. The king took back none of the rich presents which he had made to the presumed brother, probably as the purchase-money for a wife. Nor did he offer to strip the shepherd-chief of the increased wealth which had accrued to him in the fertile grazing-grounds of Goshen, where his descendants in the third generation were to be quartered. Still less, though the sheikh was wholly in the monarch's

[1] This is not told in Gen. xii., but in chap. xx. 12.

[2] Like Juno to Jupiter, so Isis was in Egyptian mythology both the sister and the wife of Osiris. Such a marriage was not held quite out of the question among the Jews of David's time, as 2 Sam. xiii. 13 shows. Abram's true relationship to Sarai, given in Gen. xx. 12, ought to have prevented the identification of her with his niece Iscah, the sister of Lot (see xi. 29), yet this suggestion is as old as Josephus.

power, did he show him the slightest violence. With nothing worse than a reproach, which is severe just because it is so gently expressed, he bade him take back his wife and be gone.

The length of Abram's residence in Egypt cannot be determined. One incidental consequence, however, seems to be traceable to it. He returned to his highland camping-ground near Bethel a much more extensive sheep-master than he left it. Egypt laid the foundation of the family wealth, which ultimately must have become enormous. The intricate valleys around the Bethel heights were now too confined to accommodate both Abram's increased flocks and those of his nephew. Lot had voluntarily attached himself to his uncle's fortunes, not (as it now appeared) on religious grounds alone,—perhaps not mainly,—but in the hope of obtaining a settlement somewhere for himself. It lay in the plan of God that even this remaining link to his old home should be broken, that the chosen man might be set loose from every family entanglement. For this an occasion was found in the crowded condition of their present grazing-grounds. Their herdsmen strove together about boundaries and water-rights, because the district was not able to bear them both. It was Abram's part to make the first proposal for a separation. He led his nephew

to the summit of the hill on which his altar stood. The wide prospect which spread itself around was uninviting to a shepherd's eye. To the north, the hills shut out the fair valley of Sichem. To the west and south there lay a broken hill-region, where one bare summit led the eye to a summit no less bare beyond. The valleys between were concealed from view. It was a desolate scene when you gazed on it from this elevation, although hidden away within its foldings slumbered many a fertile dale, afterwards to be heard of in Hebrew story. Eastward, however, closing the farther end of a steep pass which opened below their very feet, there stretched deep below the long green *ghor* or valley of the Jordan. Conspicuous at its southern end, and greener far than all the rest, was the prolific 'round' or 'circle' (as the Hebrews styled it), amid whose fragrant shades gleamed the white walls of at least five cities. The sight of its fertility recalled to the two sheikhs that day the well-watered flats of Egypt, which they had so recently visited together.[1] As the older man and leader of the expedition, Abram might not unfairly have selected for his own use the richest pasture-ground. But this would have ill become his nobler temper. Still less would it have served those ends for which he had come to Canaan,

[1] 'Like the land of Egypt,' Gen. xiii. 10.

to leave the free air of these lonely hills for a stifling, exuberant valley, or to exchange his tent and altar among the simple highlanders for the lot of a citizen in Sodom. So Lot made his choice and went his way, with consequences to be seen hereafter. One more effort of self-denial had completed the rupture which his uncle had made in leaving Haran. One more victory over temptation had purified the confidence of Abram in his God.

It may be that, left quite alone at last with his stony hill-tops around him, this man's heart sank somewhat. A poor portion it might seem after the wide downs of Padan-Aram; a poor portion compared with what he had that day abandoned to his nephew. If any shade of misgiving crossed his mind, how would it be dispelled when once more, for the second time since he entered Canaan, God's voice came to his ear while he stood by his altar on that early Pisgah. It came to repeat, confirm, and widen the former promise. Thus the voice spoke: 'Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward' (westward even, to where Lot's choice lay); 'for *all* the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth,

then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.'[1] In obedience to this heavenly voice, the exile broke up his Bethel encampment. The promise was become more particular now. The extent of his future possession was better defined. A numberless posterity was foretold to enjoy it. The self-denying choice was rewarded; and with a stouter heart the solitary chief could shift his restless tents in every direction, till the whole territory indicated as God's gift had been explored.

One result of this singular tour of inspection was the selection of a fresh site for his permanent camp. Quite in the south of the country stood even then Hebron, one of the very oldest towns in the world. It was occupied by the Hittite tribe, the 'sons of Heth.' In its vicinity was settled a more warlike clan of Amorites, under the chieftainship of the three brothers, Aner, Mamre, and Eshcol. In an oak grove not far from the town, which took its name from one of them, Abram now made his headquarters. The situation is one of the most favourable in the whole of Palestine. It stands at the head of a long green dale, which extends some six-and-thirty miles farther to the south; as far, in fact, as to Beersheba. That famous

[1] Gen. xiii. 14–17.

well, afterwards dug by Abram, stands close to the northern edge of the wilderness. It forms the very limit in that direction of the Holy Land; and between its lonely waters, that rise among soft, bare pastoral slopes, and the olives and vineyards which encompass Hebron, the whole district is quiet and open, sparsely peopled, and admirably adapted for pasturage. From that day till this, it has been a favourite resort for the nomadic tribes which subsist by grazing. Here it was the patriarch found an appropriate spot for his camp. Here he made for himself the nearest approach to a home which Providence permitted him in this world. At Mamre he experienced most of the chief honours and trials of his later life. At Hebron he found at last a resting-place.

VI.

PASTORAL LIFE.

NEITHER SHALL YE BUILD HOUSES, NOR SOW SEED, NOR PLANT VINEYARD, NOR HAVE ANY: BUT ALL YOUR DAYS YE SHALL LIVE IN TENTS: THAT YE MAY LIVE MANY DAYS IN THE LAND WHERE YE BE STRANGERS.

THY SERVANTS' TRADE HATH BEEN ABOUT CATTLE FROM OUR YOUTH EVEN UNTIL NOW, BOTH WE AND ALSO OUR FATHERS.

HE HAD SHEEP, AND OXEN, AND HE-ASSES, AND MEN-SERVANTS, AND MAID-SERVANTS, AND SHE-ASSES, AND CAMELS.

VI.

PASTORAL LIFE.

IT is fortunate that within the last fifty years or so, through the efforts of travellers or residents in Syria, the external features of Syrian life have been rescued and rendered familiar to all, before the rapid advance of the West shall have for ever wiped out the ancient manners of the East. Another half-century, or it may be far less time, will in all likelihood witness extensive changes in Bible lands. But nothing can now deprive us of that ample fund of Bible illustration which has been gathered up almost within living memory. In this way we have come to learn that the mode of life which Abram pursued in the south of Canaan must have closely resembled in its essential features, and even in many picturesque details, that of pastoral tribes which are still to be found in parts of Syria. It is a popular blunder to conclude that the Bedawin Arabs, who roam the waste lands of Asiatic Turkey and infest some

of its finest provinces, are fair representatives of the patriarchs, even in external respects, not to say in their morals. The patriarchs were in the habit of encamping on the same spot for years together. To some extent at least, they cultivated the soil.[1] They certainly aimed at amassing vast flocks of the smaller cattle; and with the inhabitants of adjacent walled towns they cultivated terms of friendship. All these things indicated their peaceful, industrious, and kindly character. Such characteristics belonged to a state of manners which was almost sure to be a temporary one, giving place, as society advanced, to agricultural and settled communities. But all these things are simply hateful to that scourge of the East, the true Bedawi. He despises agriculture, and breeds few cattle. He never stays long in one place. He subsists by black-mail, and looks upon all citizens as fair game for plunder, where he has the power to attempt it. He is idle, filthy, and treacherous; a barbarian who has had the chance to civilise himself, and has refused it. Between this type of man and the young race which is on its way to civilisation, the difference is endless.[2] If anywhere, it is rather in out-of-the-way districts, where society has been arrested at an early stage, among the milder and more settled tribes

[1] Gen. xxvi. 12.

[2] So Thomson, in *Land and Book*, p. 296 (English edition).

of Arab blood, for example, or in the secluded and peaceful valleys of the Lebanon, that communities may still be found whose primitive pastoral manners recall with vividness the Book of Genesis, and make it live again before the traveller's eyes.

When with such help we endeavour to piece together the scattered allusions of the sacred story so as to form a picture of the outward life of Abram, it is as a wealthy emir or shepherd-chieftain we have to represent him. His wealth was portable. It consisted mainly in extensive flocks of sheep and goats, which were bred chiefly for their wool, and the milk of which, more than their flesh, furnished the staple article of food. To these were added smaller herds of camels and asses, but not horses, to be employed in riding or as beasts of burden. Oxen were probably of less consequence until the use of the plough became general. Though cattle thus constituted the leading item in the chief's property, a metallic medium of exchange was not unknown. For this purpose silver was used in uncoined masses (probably ring-shaped), the value of which, whether impressed upon each or not, could always be ascertained by weighing them. Gold is not spoken of as a currency; but it was twisted into armlets, nose-rings, and similar objects of female ornament.

The care of extensive flocks in an unfenced country, which is roamed by tribes often at feud with each other, and from which the wild beasts have not yet been extirpated, demands a considerable number of herdsmen. These were usually slaves. From what origin the household slavery of the earliest ages sprang, whether from military conquest alone, or from individual bankruptcy and other causes, we have no materials for determining. But the numbers included in that unhappy class must already have been very large; and as the state of bondage was hereditary, it could not fail to be ever increasing. The servile household of Abram was probably excessive in proportion to the size of his family; since he was, for peculiar reasons, in the position of a sheikh without a clan following. The entire charge of his property, therefore, had to be entrusted to slave-labour, as the only form of alien labour known to his age. How large a number he possessed may be gathered from the fact that, within ten years after his migration, he was able to tell off fully three hundred young men able to bear arms and endure a forced march. Slaves were either purchased or home-born. The latter, being the children of slaves of the same master who had grown up in his service, were naturally esteemed the most trustworthy; and it is a further proof of the extent of his household, that the whole band which

pursued Chedorlaomer was composed of this class.[1] Over such a large community of dependants, comprising many families with their wives and children, the chief of the clan ruled with a paternal despotism. His people were absolutely in his power; but that power was no doubt under a certain check from the close vicinity of similar clans, all of which acknowledged the same rude, unwritten law of consuetude. At any rate, the excessive authority vested in the emir does not appear to have been often abused. In the case of Abram, we know that he acted as the religious instructor and the priest of his wide encampment, as well as its master.

This did not hinder the personal habits even of a rich and powerful sheikh, or of his family, from exhibiting the most primitive simplicity. Of anything like softness or luxury we find not the slightest trace, at least in Abram's lifetime. His dwelling was a tent, probably of dark-brown camel's-hair cloth, like the tents of his dependants. Only in this was he distinguished from them, that a separate tent was pitched for the females of his family. His repast was spread for him before the tent door, beneath the shade of some friendly tree. The most usual articles of food were *leben*, or sour coagulated milk (which is still the chief dish

[1] Gen. xiv. 14.

of the Syrian Arab), and unleavened cakes baked upon the hot hearth. To these might be added on festive occasions, or when strangers were to be entertained, the roasted flesh of a kid or of a calf. Wine was known, but it was sparingly used. Hospitality to the passing traveller ranked among the most sacred and imperative of all duties, as is usually the case wherever public places of rest or entertainment do not exist. On such occasions the chief did not deem it beneath his rank to select the animal for slaughter with his own hands, nor did his wife disdain to knead and bake the cakes. The same unspoilt and simple condition of manners is suggested when we read of even chiefs' daughters going unveiled to the camp-well to draw water for household use, or tending and watering the cattle. Such a fact as this is of still greater consequence; for it reveals how free and healthy was the place occupied by woman in patriarchal society. No better test of the purity of manners could be found. The jealous seclusion of the female sex, which prevails with such mischievous results in the Mohammedan East, was evidently unknown to the men of Hebrew race. Monogamy was still the rule, even outside the Terah connection. Like Abram, Isaac had only one wife. Jacob designed to marry but one. Joseph had no more that we know of. Even

Abi-melech seems to have observed the same limits.[1] The only member of the chosen family who deliberately violated the good old custom was the reckless and half-pagan Esau. It is true that secondary wives, holding a legal and recognised position inferior to that of the true wife, were common. These were slaves, however; and in the cases which occur within the Hebrew line, they owed their place to a peculiar usage, dictated by the excessive desire for offspring characteristic of the Hebrew race. The concubine was no doubt a too familiar feature of the age we are portraying, and marked a certain decline from the primeval marriage law. But on a quite different level stood the wife. She still occupied her rightful place by her husband's side as his companion and counsellor; nor have we in any literature many examples of conjugal affection and fidelity more noble than are furnished by the loves of Abram and Sarai, of Isaac and Rebecca, of Jacob and Rachel.

The centre of the pastoral life, then as now, was the well-mouth. In a dry climate, where the rainfall, however abundant, came only in certain months of the year, and where surface reservoirs to detain and store it were insufficiently provided, deep wells were a necessity of existence. They were too difficult and

[1] Gen. xx. 17.

expensive to dig to be very frequently met with.[1] To the flockmaster, therefore, the possession of them, or free access to them, became a matter of supreme consequence, and naturally a constant subject of dispute among neighbours. The well was the focus of the shepherd's activity. Around its mouth stood a series of stone troughs for the watering of his cattle. Towards it, in the cool of the evening, trooped the young women with their pitchers. The permanent encampment required to be set up in convenient proximity to it. From it, at the dry season, no flock dared wander far away. Beside it every traveller halted his camels. The poetry of life, its pastimes and its business, all clustered round the well.

Within an outward dress and scenery so simple as this, how natural, how wholesome, how elevated, might be the inner life of men! The wide spaces of pasture-land, bare in summer drought, or gay with wild-flowers of spring; long, lonely days, lazily passed in watching the 'few sheep in the wilderness;' nights spent on the open ground, with the countless wakeful stars for company; the still morning, fresh with dew, its silence broken by

[1] How important an event the digging of a well was, and how it touched the sympathies of the people, may yet be seen in that snatch of a very early lyric, the Song of the Well, preserved in the Book of Numbers, xxi. 17, 18.

cheery tinkle of sheep-bells as the flocks dispersed; the plain fare; the pure domestic love; the reverence for age; the habit of commanding without tyranny, and obeying without servility; the artless dignity of a breeding which had not lost true courtesy in conventionalisms; the legendary tales of famous ancestors, crystallizing into fit, terse language as it passed from father to son; wild words of song, hot with the passion of a glowing past, chanted around the camp-fire; the solemn gathering of all the clan for sacrifice where the altar of its chief stood beneath the memorial or consecrated tree:—how remote appears such a life as this from the feverish haste and vulgar competition and distracting complexity of our own age! How restful it looks to us! how reverent! how favourable to simple virtues and the nourishment of a grave religious spirit! It is true there is another side to the pastoral life. When it lacks the inspiration drawn from grand, devout beliefs, it tends to degenerate into thoughtless vacuity. The stimulus to progress being absent, it has sometimes reduced men to a stupid animalism, akin to that of their cattle. But when the voice of God is heard in the silence of the wilderness, or a pathway to His shining house perceived to rise from the sands to the stars, then the solitude and monotony of the wide pasture may become as fit a training-school as

any for spiritual faith, an ample and becoming temple for the loftiest converse of the human soul with God. Then it may with truth be said: 'How awful is this place! It is the House of God: it is the Gate to Heaven!'

VII.

AN INVASION FROM THE EAST.

I WILL GIVE PEACE IN THE LAND, AND YE SHALL LIE DOWN, AND NONE SHALL MAKE YOU AFRAID : . . . AND FIVE OF YOU SHALL CHASE AN HUNDRED, AND AN HUNDRED OF YOU SHALL PUT TEN THOUSAND TO FLIGHT : AND YOUR ENEMIES SHALL FALL BEFORE YOU BY THE SWORD.

THE WICKED FLEE WHEN NO MAN PURSUETH :
BUT THE RIGHTEOUS ARE BOLD AS A LION.

JESUS, MADE AN HIGH PRIEST FOR EVER AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK. FOR THIS MELCHIZEDEK, KING OF SALEM, PRIEST OF THE MOST HIGH GOD, MET ABRAHAM RETURNING FROM THE SLAUGHTER OF THE KINGS, AND BLESSED HIM ; TO WHOM ALSO ABRAHAM GAVE A TENTH PART OF ALL.

VII.

AN INVASION FROM THE EAST.

A FEW years before Abram entered Canaan as a peaceful emigrant, a far more powerful chieftain from the remote East had visited the same land as an invader. At various periods, different portions of the country which is drained by the Euphrates river-system have in turn wielded supreme influence in Asia. At the time we speak of, it was neither Assyria nor Babylon which stood foremost, but Elam. This district lies beyond Chaldea, on the east side even of the Tigris, and embraces the rich flats which separate that river from the bounding mountain range of Zagros. Its capital was the very ancient and powerful city of Susa. Some time before, the sovereign of this state[1] had overcome Chaldea; and its present ruler, whose name reads in Genesis Chedorlaomer, but in

[1] Named Kudur-Nakhunta, according to Rawlinson, *Ancient Monarchies*, i. p. 160. A fuller notice of this Elamitic dynasty will be found in Rawlinson, *Ib.* pp. 160–163.

the monuments Khudur-Lagamer, now extended his arms as far as Canaan. His object is evident. The ambition of all empires on the Euphrates, from the earliest time, was to keep open communication with their rivals in Egypt. It has been explained in an earlier page, that the only practicable route betwixt the Euphrates and the Nile, either for military marches or for commerce, traversed the great Syrian Desert south-westward till it struck the northern end of the Jordan valley, then either crossed to the coast or held down that valley as far as the south of the Dead Sea. Possession of this route, or at least political supremacy over the tribes along its course, became, therefore, a supreme object with conquerors from the farther East. It was in this way that Palestine became in every age involved in that gigantic strife betwixt the states of Euphrates and Nile, which fills ancient history.

On his first invasion, Chedorlaomer had subdued the five walled towns of the plain or 'circle' of the Jordan. Closely set together in that hot, flat round of land just where the river enters the Dead Sea, with Sodom for their head, these five towns could dominate the whole route from Damascus to Memphis. When Lot took up his home near them, they were paying tribute to the King of Elam. The hand of so distant a suzerain could press heavily enough, no doubt. But the power behind it

was out of sight, and, like all West Syrian states in similar cases, the five towns attempted after a while to shake off the yoke. To chastise this revolt, Chedorlaomer undertook a second expedition. Combining his own forces with those of three friendly or vassal rulers in the Euphrates valley, which lay on his way, he swept across the desert, and fell upon the wild tribes which then harboured in the mountains of Bashan and Moab. The invader's plan was to ravage the country to the east, south, and south-west of the Jordan towns, before actually investing them, so as to cut them off from support from their neighbours. His progress can be tracked from tribe to tribe. Formidable clans of aborigines of great stature then held the fastnesses to the east of Jordan: the Rephaim, in the north, which was later termed Bashan; the Zusim, between the Jabbok and the Arnon, whom afterwards the Ammonites expelled; south of the Arnon, the Emim, where Moab was by and by to dwell. Beyond the southern end of the Dead Sea, the conqueror came upon a race of cave-dwellers or Horites, in those singular rock excavations of Mount Seir which the art of a later time enlarged into the cave palaces, temples, and tombs that still astonish the traveller. This was his southern limit. Turning then sharply to the westward, the Elamites ravaged the desert which stretches

between Edom and Egypt, with the view, as it seems, of securing the caravan route across the desert of the Et-tih. At a point marked by an ancient oak they stayed their progress, not far from the Egyptian border; thence they turned back to retrace their steps eastward, keeping, however, along a line close to the south frontier of Canaan, through a territory afterwards occupied by the Amalekites. Finally, they ventured a dash into Canaan itself, keeping still south of Hebron, whence their wasteful march was watched with anxiety by Abram and his Amorite neighbours. Portions of the same tribe lying not far off were to suffer at their hands. Abram and his allies saw the fires of the foe draw off in the direction of the Dead Sea, where lay the doomed cities that had been the final object of all this circuitous foray. The Eastern army seized as it passed on the Amorite town En-Gedi, now pronounced Ain-Jidy, to make sure of that terrific pass—more like a staircase than a pass—down which it was about to swoop upon the cities below. At last, Chedorlaomer encountered resistance. Encouraged by the pitchy nature of the soil, in which horsemen and heavy chariots could move with difficulty, the townspeople risked an engagement on open ground with their powerful assailant. In spite, however, of the bitumen pits, the day went against the effemi-

nate and dissolute men of Sodom, in whose case, as in so many others, social corruption was proving itself a harbinger of political overthrow. Of course the capture and sack of those wealthy towns followed on the defeat of their troops. Weary at length with devastation, burdened with booty, and encumbered in its march by crowds of captives, the foreign host began slowly to withdraw up the valley on its homeward march.

In this narrative I have hardly done more than paraphrase the minute and graphic text of Genesis. There is much probability in the suggestion of Ewald, that the fourteenth chapter embodies a fragment of secular history from some more ancient document. Whether this be so or not, it is a little startling, in the midst of 'Abram the Hebrew's' religious and peaceful career, to come thus suddenly upon the din and carnage of a great military expedition, fraught with political results of imperial magnitude. Not that the story is destitute of religious significance. For now we are to see how confidence in God can turn timid men to heroes, and give conquest to the weak. In Egypt, Abram had shown how distrustful and pusillanimous he could be. When the Elamites swept past his home at a few miles' distance, he sat still like the native chiefs, and dared not stir. It was the capture of his nephew with all his

household and fortune which roused the family spirit in the son of Terah; and the pressure of this great need threw him once more upon God as the arm of his strength. Though the Amorite leaders beside him had their own griefs to avenge, yet Abram was the soul of the league as well as its head. The force with which he set out in pursuit was a slender one, but his light-armed shepherds moved the swifter. In four or five days they overtook the invaders. They came upon the cumbered and careless host, spread over that lonely basin girdled with hills in which the Jordan takes its rise. As with Joshua, Abram's warlike descendant, when on the same spot he fell suddenly upon the allied Canaanites, and in a single battle won all northern Palestine; as with Gideon, still later, when his three hundred startled the sleeping Midianites in the vale of Jezreel; so now with Abram. Changed all at once from a peaceful shepherd to a captain of fighting men, he fell in three bands by night upon the unsuspecting camp, and chased them in headlong panic as far to the northward as Damascus.

The King of Sodom himself had not been amongst the prisoners. He had probably saved himself by a timely flight to the mountains from the field of battle. When he received tidings of the rescue, he set out to meet and

welcome the deliverer of his people. His route up from the Jordan (possibly by the Kidron gorge) struck the main central road along which Abram and his confederates were marching back, close by a sacred hill, crowned already with a city which was to become in the history of Abram's race more sacred still. Doubt has recently been cast upon this identification of Salem with the site of Jerusalem, an identification in which all Jewish authorities agree, and which is even supposed to have on its side the weight of later scripture.[1] It is, of course, impossible to prove that the meeting could take place at no other Salem, out of the variety of localities which bore so familiar a name; but the position of Jerusalem answers (to say the least) as well as any other, and in such a case some value may fairly be attached to a very ancient and unbroken tradition. Here, then, in a spot known (possibly from this cause) as 'the King's Dale,' we may suppose that the Sodomite and the patriarch met, for the first time and the last: representatives, the one of the decaying pagan race on which the wrath of Heaven had just begun to fall; the other of a new, consecrated, and select race, to which God's mercy was already pledged.

[1] See Ps. lxxvi. 2. Mr. Grove, in Smith's *Dict.*, Art. 'Salem,' argues against the traditional view, abandoning all hope of a solution. Dean Stanley has a note in his *Sinai and Palestine* (p. 249) in favour of Mount Gerizim as the site of Melchizedek's Salem.

From the one, the soil it had polluted was about to be gradually taken away in judgment. For the other, the land was for gracious purposes to be held in reserve as a holy land. The King of Sodom was grateful. Abram's sword had won for the guilty towns a respite, which a little later his prayers failed to secure for them; and the king showed his gratitude with a royal liberality, by proffering to the shepherd chief the whole of the recovered booty. There is something like the repugnance with which holiness recoils from the unholy in the solemn and almost vehement oath with which Abram refused to touch anything that was the king's. He felt himself to be the land's chosen and lawful heir. To him it had all been granted in reversion, by a deed of grace from 'Jehovah, the most high God, possessor' (as Abram is careful to note) 'of heaven and earth.' In presence of a claim so sacred, it did not become him to accept at meaner hands any portion of his heritage; least of all at the hands of men whose vices were already polluting and darkening the land. So kingly could be this man's port when he realized in his soul his calling of God. It is the favour of Heaven that ennobles earthly natures.

Unwilling as Abram was to accept any of the plunder in acknowledgment of the service he had rendered, he was careful at the same time to rob neither man nor God. His native allies

received their share. Before distribution of it was made, however, one-tenth of the entire property which had been recovered in battle was solemnly dedicated as an act of religious homage to Almighty God, in response to the divine benediction conveyed through the hands of His priest Melchizedek. It is thus there steps upon the scene one of the most mysterious personages of Holy Writ. Nothing which we have thus far been able to gather respecting the religious condition of Canaan in the age of Abram has prepared us to find at the head of any of its tribes, not only a worshipper of the true God, but a man of such priestly sanctity, that beneath his hand the patriarch himself bows to receive the blessing of God, and through him the patriarch prefers his grateful offerings to Jehovah. Even in the simple prose of Genesis, the incident reads as though it meant more than meets the ear. The brief and unexplained introduction, only this once, of a person so eminent; his symbolical acts and lofty relation to Abram; with the significance of his name and title, combining as these do the related ideas of righteousness and peace; —these things combine to invest him with an air of mystery, and must early have fastened on him a curious and reverential attention. Possibly the mystery and the grandeur would largely disappear, could we interrogate the

author of this venerable fragment of story, or ascertain all the particulars which he has so lightly passed over. Enshrined as it was, however, in the sacred Book, it lent itself to the purposes of later prophecy. May we not say it was intended to lend itself to such use? The author of one of the most messianic of all Israel's lyrics, who was certainly no other than King David himself,[1] was guided to borrow this venerable figure of the grand, dim priest-king of old, before whom even the founder of his people took the second place, in order to foreshadow that coming Seed of Abraham in whom was to meet every office of dignity and of service. A Priest He was to be above all consecrated men of Israel's race; a King nobler far in blood and ampler in sway than the royal singer who owned Him for his Lord. Under His safe and equitable government should be fulfilled that perfect ideal of a just ruler which David extolled with dying lips,[2]—one who 'rules in the fear of God,' and whose influence upon his happy subjects is like the cloudless light of dawn, when after rain the sun rises in perfect peace upon the tender grass. Finally, David's poetical employment of Melchizedek to set forth the surpassing elevation of Messiah is made the

[1] Ps. cx. 4. The authorship is decided by the reference of our Lord in Matt. xxii. 41–45; but even critics with whom this is not conclusive accept David as the writer.

[2] 2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4.

basis of a long theological argument by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews;[1] and justly, so far as the purpose is concerned which the writer has in view. For both in history and in poetical prophecy, the position assigned to this remarkable figure is clearly one which cannot be ranked alongside the descendants of Abram, but must be placed above them. No priestly Israelite, sprung from Abram through his great-grandson Levi, can claim as lofty or divine a priesthood as the man before whom Abram himself was content to bend for the blessing. If 'perfection' had been attained 'through means of the Levitical priesthood,' it was fair for the Christian teacher to ask his Jewish brethren, 'what further need there was that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek.'[2]

When the use of this man's name by later scripture is thus recalled, one can hardly be surprised to find theologians running wild in their conjectures regarding him. Some have imagined him to be an angel in disguise. Certain Jewish authorities took him for the patriarch Shem; certain Christian ones for the Son of God manifest before His incarnation. Others, more daring still, supposed him to be the Holy Ghost. The sober historical spirit of the present day inclines to see in him no more

[1] Heb. vii. [2] Heb. vii. 11.

than what Josephus saw,[1] a local prince at the head of some tribe of immigrants; probably the chief of a party of Shemites, who had come from the East to settle in Canaan as Abram himself had done, who therefore spoke the same tongue and preserved among them the same traditional knowledge of the one true God. Plainly he was a monotheist; but the very name which he uniformly gives to the Supreme Being—'God the Most High,' with the further title, 'Possessor of the heaven and the earth'—suggests that he was probably compelled by his position to uphold his primitive faith in the unity of the Godhead against the 'gods many' and 'lords many' of his neighbours. In him, therefore, Abram might recognise not only a confessor of the same faith with himself, but even a fellow-protestant against the same errors in religion. Both the divine name and the divine title he accepts as Melchizedek uses them; but to these he is careful to prefix a name Melchizedek had not employed—a more personal, definite, and profound name, under which, therefore, it is clear that he specially desired to acknowledge the God Who had called him from the East. It is the sacred name of Jehovah.[2] Abram was all

[1] It must be confessed, at the same time, that Josephus' account (see *Antiq.* i. 10) is meagre in the extreme. He misses quite the religious significance both of Melchizedek's blessing and of Abram's tithe, and seems anxious to give as 'rational' a version of the story as he can.

[2] On the divine names in Genesis, see Note B in the Appendix.

that Melchizedek was; but he was more. To Abram, God was all that He was to Melchizedek; but He was more. The personal communications which already it had pleased Jehovah to make to this man, though much less full than those he was shortly to receive, had been enough to lift him above the purest and most advanced among his contemporaries. They had discovered to him new aspects of Heaven's grace; and if they had not given rise to a new name for God, which can hardly be supposed, at least they had given to the grandest of the old names a fresh power and meaning.

It was thus on a basis of common belief and worship that Abram and Melchizedek met; only their intercourse assumed on the side of the latter a superior sacerdotal office. The grounds for this, it appears to me, we have no longer the means for ascertaining; and it is therefore at this point that we touch what is really obscure in the narrative. Of course, like many chieftains in early society, Melchizedek may well have combined the regal and the sacerdotal dignities. But why he should have held as the priest of God, Whom he knew as the Most High, a higher or more sacred position than Abram, who also discharged in his own household priestly functions, — whether this arose from his more venerable age, from his representing an older line of descent, from any

specific intimation of the divine will, or from other circumstances equally unknown to us, who shall undertake to say? The evidence that his priesthood was acknowledged to be of a higher order lies in two facts: first, in the bestowal of the divine blessing upon Abram by his lips; and next, in the offering of Abram's tithe to God through his hands. Both were strictly sacerdotal acts. He brought to the conqueror bread and wine, — not simply, as Josephus puts it, for the refreshment of his followers, but as a symbol of the divine blessing, which as God's priest he invoked upon the head of God's prophet and servant. For the first time these type-forms of all solid and liquid food — destined long after to become sacramental symbols of the nutriment of the spirit's higher life—occur as emblems of every material blessing. They represent all those products of the soil which minister to man. Under the special circumstances of Abram, they probably intimated that by his valiant defence of the land and vindication of its freedom, he had merited the possession of its choicest gifts. The blessing which was uttered over the hero, along with such symbols of benediction, recognised his military success as given by God. God is the true ruler of the rescued land, and the only giver of victory to the arms of its defenders. To this consecration of his victory,

the sheikh responded by an appropriate offering of homage. To God, under the same character as Lord of the soil and Arbiter in battle, Who alone has ordained to every tribe the bounds of its habitation, Abram devoted one-tenth of the recovered spoil. The origin of this proportion —a tithe—is too remote now to be traced. Plainly it was a religious sacrifice of thanksgiving. With this ceremony, in which even Sodom's king was compelled to yield a tribute to the God of Abram, the priest Melchizedek retreats, as suddenly as he appeared, into the silence and obscurity from which for one brief moment he had emerged. A strange figure, indeed, to flit across the light in that distant dawn of history! A royal priest, without predecessor or successor that we hear of, yet honoured to stand and minister between even Abram and his God, commissioned to bless the man in whom rested by divine decree the promised blessing for all mankind, and offer back to Heaven the first-fruits of the land of promise! No wonder an office so imposing and unusual as this impressed the imagination of Abram's greatest son save One,—of him who was the first of his race to rule in Melchizedek's own capital, and who himself united in his person both the dignities which in him had been united. No other approached nearer than David himself to the ideal which he found

outlined in Melchizedek, until He came at length of Whom David was inspired to sing:

'Jehovah said unto my Lord:
"Sit Thou at My right hand,
Until I make Thy foes Thy footstool!
The sceptre of Thy strength shall Jehovah stretch out of Zion!
Rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies!"[1]
Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent,
"Thou art a Priest for ever
After the order of Melchizedek."'

[1] Compare the terms of the blessing in Gen. xiv. 20: 'God hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand.'

VIII.

JEHOVAH'S COVENANT.

ABRAHAM MY FRIEND.

LOOK UNTO THE ROCK WHENCE YE ARE HEWN,
AND TO THE HOLE OF THE PIT WHENCE YE ARE DIGGED!
LOOK UNTO ABRAHAM YOUR FATHER,
AND UNTO SARAH THAT BARE YOU!
FOR I CALLED HIM ALONE,
AND BLESSED HIM, AND INCREASED HIM.

'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' KNOW YE THEREFORE, THAT THEY WHICH ARE OF FAITH, THE SAME ARE THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM.

IF THE INHERITANCE BE OF THE LAW, IT IS NO MORE OF PROMISE: BUT GOD GAVE IT TO ABRAHAM BY PROMISE.

VIII

JEHOVAH'S COVENANT.

NEVER had Abram stood higher in outward honour, or sustained a more heroic part, than at the close of the Eastern invasion. Yet, by a revulsion not unusual with men of a highly-strung temperament, it was 'after these things' that he fell into a despondent, dispirited condition. He began to be alarmed for his position; and this seems to have led him half to question the words on which for ten years he had been building his life, and half to feel as though any fulfilment they were likely to have was scarcely worth the waiting for. This is not the attitude of mind which is commonly associated with the model man of faith. It shows that he was subject to like passions with other men. His faith had its conflicts with doubt, and his courage its intervals of depression, like those of lesser believers. Several reasons for such a mood at this juncture in his affairs can be fairly guessed at, and are worth attention.

For one thing, a certain reaction was natural after the sudden and unaccustomed strain of the Sodom war. The anxious though inactive watch he had long kept on the march of the invader; his hurried levy at last, and rapid chase; the night attack crowned with splendid success; the solemn home-coming; the high-pitched devotion in which he offered the first-fruits of spoil to God; and the generous temper with which he refused for himself the value of a thread;—all these formed so great a change from the placid, uneventful years of a shepherd, as partly to explain the reaction which followed.

Besides, his over-wrought spirits might well sink when he calmly reviewed the situation. He had defeated Chedorlaomer, it was true, by a surprise; but in doing so he had made an enemy of the most powerful monarch in Asia, and the arm which was long enough to chastise the revolted cities could easily avenge upon one man the disgraceful rout at Dan. How was he to withstand a fresh foray from the Euphrates, supposing the confederates to return next season? Especially since by his attitude to the King of Sodom he had just thrown away his first good chance for securing a foothold in the land, or a predominant position of influence among its native tribes. Nay, was it wise, or was it worth his while, to have put himself forward as a 'shield' or champion of the territory

God had promised him, seeing that, were it ten times his own, it must after all pass into the hand of a stranger?

Here lay the most painful and staggering feature in Abram's position. Ten years had now elapsed since he bade farewell to his fatherland at God's bidding, yet the hopes with which he entered Canaan seemed as far as ever from being realized. Only twice during these years had God broken silence. The voice which spoke in Haran had spoken once at Moreh on his arrival, and again near Bethel on his return from Egypt. Each successive utterance confirmed what had gone before. Each added a little definiteness to the original promise. In Haran God said: 'I will show thee a land: I will make of thee a great nation.' At Moreh, both the halves of this promise became better defined: 'This is the land: I will give it to thy seed.' Still more ample was the third repetition of it. Then Abram was told to search Canaan through, with the assurance that it should become his own, 'in the length of it, and the breadth of it;' while the seed of promise was to be as numerous as the dust of the land beneath his feet. So much, then, and no more, had been given to the man on which to rest his confidence. How such prospects as these were to be realized had not yet been told. Of their ever being realized at all, no sign appeared.

Abram was a childless man. Head of a wide camp, in which were many households, where the merry shouts of little slave boys and girls rang all day long, his own tent stood aloft in the centre solitary and silent. Every year that passed made it the less likely that his union should be blessed with issue. Of what use, then, was it to risk life, as he was doing, in the land's defence, if after all its possession was in a few years to pass to no blood descendants, no increasing clan to call him in future generations its father, but only to a servile household, with a slave for its future chieftain? Viewed in this temper of mind, the promises by which he had been allured out of Haran certainly looked less bright than they had done at first. They barely seemed to recompense him for the peril into which he had now been brought. 'What wilt Thou give me,' was the sad question which filled his mind, 'seeing I go childless? Thou hast given me no seed.'

To this somewhat querulous and faint-hearted remonstrance, it pleased the Most High to afford His servant very ample and satisfactory replies. Before that wonderful vision came to a close which is reported in the fifteenth of Genesis, Abram knew that his heir was not to be Eliezer, but a son of his own body begotten. He knew also that the actual possession of Canaan was not to be achieved in his own life-

time at all, not even for centuries after his decease, but in a far future, foreseen of God, after his descendants should have multiplied like the stars of heaven. Finally, he learned that his own remaining lifetime was to be spent neither in fighting for territory nor in enjoying it, but in peaceful pastoral pursuits. All this was revealed to him in order that his discomposure might be for ever allayed, and a more solid basis provided for his patient hope in God.

Yet such a gracious revelation of the future was neither the first nor the chief foundation which God offered to His servant's faith. It is not such a foundation as God is accustomed to offer to other men. In ordinary life, people are not assured beforehand of their future fortunes. We cannot tell whether the evils we dread are or are not to return and vex us; nor do we possess any assurance of such a 'reward' in this world as our hearts cry after. The true defence of the soul against fear, and her true recompense under sacrifice or loss in the path of duty, is God Himself. That He is our 'Shield' so long as we do His will, our 'Reward' for whatever His will may cost us, is the real stay of faith. To such a deep and everlasting source of support and consolation did the Almighty design to lead His desponding servant by those opening words of the new oracle: 'Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.'

It was worth while by such noble words to recall Abram to the true meaning of his call out of Haran. To what end, after all, had he followed the divine voice into exile and pilgrimage? For a home, or a tract of country, or a line of descendants, or to become the founder of a nation? Was it not rather that he might cleave in free devotion to the worship of the only living God, forsaking all false ones, and in trust, obedience, and self-denial for His sake, keep that favour which is better than life? If only he could be assured that the living and most high God was on his side, propitious and overshadowing, why need he dread the Persian sword or miss the ownership of Canaan? The earthly boons of God are good; and such boons had been promised to this man—ample territory, numerous descendants. But God is better than His gifts! The best portion any soul can win is to know, and love, and possess in the indestructible communion of love, Him Who is the possessor of earth and heaven!

That it is possible for man as he is, infirm, erring, and guilty, to attain to such a hold as this on the favour and friendship of God, is the supreme discovery of every religious life. Abram was by no means the first to make this discovery. In substance it had been the joy of his sainted forefathers, before the flood and

since it. Neither was it a discovery which Abram had now for the first time to make. In substance he must have chosen God's favour as his best 'reward,' before he could have found it in his heart to wander forth from home. What was really to be new in the relationship of God with Abram was this: that now for the first time in his experience, and with him first of all men, God in His condescension was about to seal these terms of gracious friendship by a formal, outward league or covenant.

For it is at this point that we first encounter in such a connection this great Bible term—covenant; a term on which henceforth so much of the divine dealings with mankind was to hinge, and around which the whole of theology has often been made to revolve. Not that it is the earliest occurrence of the word in Scripture. In the record of the divine promises made to Noah as the head of the race after the flood, we are told that God established a 'covenant,' of which the rainbow was constituted the perpetual 'token.'[1] That covenant was an engagement on God's part that thenceforth, till the close of human history, the ordinary course of nature should be suffered to continue, unbroken by any catastrophe on a scale so immense as to threaten the total extinction of human life. It was entered into with the entire race of human

[1] Gen. ix. 8-17.

beings, considered as a portion of the sentient life on the surface of the globe, and with all other species of animals domesticated by man or serviceable to him. It was thus universal and unalterable. It referred to nothing higher than animal life on earth. It secured no moral or spiritual blessing. Quite a new thing happened when God was pleased to covenant for the second time,—not now with all men, but with one man and his posterity; not with man as an earthly animal, but as an immortal spirit; not by mere promise on His own part, but by promise conditioned by religious trust and obedience on the part of man; not for the sake of guaranteeing to all men physical existence, but for the sake of securing to faithful men the spiritual blessing of eternal life.

The new covenant now to be made with Abram was thus in many respects a far higher and more valuable one than had been made with Noah. Still, it fell under the same general idea. Before we describe its establishment, it may be worth while to consider what essentially a covenant implies, and how the relations of the Divine Being with His human creature came to be cast into such a mould.

Men early found out that the unsupported words of one another were not to be trusted. The security of society depends on each man's fidelity to his engagements; but temptations to

break faith are strong, and the spoken word, at a time when the art of writing is not in use, may be easily forgotten, or denied, or evaded. It was natural, therefore, to back the word of promise on important occasions with some solemn religious sanction, to lend it weight by impressive formalities, and to keep it in recollection by attaching it to some visible and permanent object. Of course, the chief occasion on which primitive men desired to bind one another after so solemn a fashion was when they sought to secure themselves against mutual hostility. Society in its first stages is usually split into small clans or tribes, with ill-defined boundaries and endless feuds. Between such tribes war is the normal condition. Peace is always hard to guarantee, but it is simply hopeless until an understanding has been arrived at on disputed questions which both sides will bind themselves by common securities to respect. Hence one of the earliest forms of contract—if not the very earliest—known to primitive society is the league of peace betwixt neighbouring tribes. With such contracts Abram was familiar enough. His recent exploit had been possible just because he was in alliance with Mamre and his two brothers. At this very moment he may have been actually casting about to strengthen his position by fresh combinations. Some years later we shall find

him contracting a treaty with the Philistine lord of Gerar. Into so familiar a form did God cast His gracious approaches to man. With no Canaanitish or Amorite chieftain merely was Abram to be leagued henceforth for protection against Chedorlaomer, or for aid in the acquisition of his promised territory. 'The Most High God Himself, possessor of earth and heaven,' condescended to become his celestial Ally, the Shield of His humble friend in every peril, and his Reward for every sacrifice.

It is surely a sublime thought which then for the first time entered into human experience, to colour it for ever. That on any terms a mightier than the mightiest mortal potentate may link His resources to the fortunes of a single feeble man, so as to guarantee to him the friendship and assistance of Heaven, is the most inspiring, and has in a thousand instances shown itself to be the most sustaining, of beliefs. Nothing arms a man so readily with a superhuman courage, or nerves him for such superhuman efforts of endurance, as to be thus lifted into alliance with the Eternal. It gives to the soul a lien, a clear, lawful hold, upon Omnipotence, if only the soul will dare, in the enthusiasm or abandonment of a childlike faith, to reckon upon the fidelity of God.

The characteristic thing about such 'covenants' of God with men lies here, that the

engagement must originate on the side of God Himself, springing out of His free favour, with a view to ratify some spontaneous promise on His part. Man can exact no terms from Heaven. No creature dare stipulate for conditions with his Creator. It is when the Most High, out of His own mere mercy, volunteers to bind Himself by a promise for the future, and, having done so, stoops still further to give a pledge for the execution of that promise, that what may fairly be termed a 'covenant' is established. Surely it becomes us to adore with reverent gratitude, not only the substantial kindness of such a promise, but also the condescension of its covenant form. In substance, God becomes man's friend, and makes a sinful man once more a friend of God. In New Testament language, He is reconciling this member of the world to Himself. From this central core or heart of the transaction there may flow various streams of blessing, according to circumstances or the age and need of the human party. Always, in one form or another, God binds Himself to bless the man. He takes the man's side against his foes: or He undertakes to secure the man in his earthly inheritance: or He permits the man to count upon His aid in emergencies: or He pledges Himself to compensate in higher blessings for whatever sacrifice He may meanwhile demand:

or He restricts the promise to inward benefits, as a pacified conscience and a pure heart. But, whatever may be the character or extent of the blessings to which the divine promise gives a title, there is underlying all the rest a gracious re-knitting of the ancient broken bond betwixt the fallen man and his God, a restoration of amity where transgression had planted enmity and ruptured intercourse.

Gracious as this restored friendship is in its substance, it is no less gracious in its form. Its form is an accommodation to the weakness of human trust; and human trust is weak because of the deceitfulness of human hearts. What men are fain to exact from their treacherous fellow-men, that the faithful and true God deigns to offer them. For this Promiser to ratify His word by a sign or token, to exchange with men reciprocal guarantees, or to bind Himself under the sanction of an oath, means that He acts just as suspected human promisers are required to act. It means that He stoops to tie Himself in those melancholy bonds by which men seek to reduce the risks of falsehood; those asseverations and securities of which Christ has told us that they can only come of evil.[1] To a concession so ineffable and touching as this does the All-truthful descend

[1] See Matt. v. 37. Compare Heb. vi. 13–18, referring to Gen. xxii. 16, of which mention will be made later.

in His humility, that it may become a little more easy for our suspicious hearts to place reliance in the words of His grace!

On two occasions in the life of this patriarch can it be said with accuracy that God covenanted with him.[1] Yet these two do not justify us in speaking of two covenants. They gave prominence to different parts of the original promise, and they ratified it by the adhesion of the several parties. On the one occasion the land, on the other the seed, held the foreground; in the earlier it was Jehovah Himself, in the later it was Abram, who sealed his adhesion by a formal act. What proves that they referred to one covenant only, and not two, is that on the later occasion all that had been guaranteed on the earlier one was reaffirmed and embodied afresh.[2] There was, in fact, a briefer and more partial edition of the covenant between God and His servant, followed, when the man grew ripe for it, by a full and final one.

The earlier occasion I speak of happened, as far as one can judge, immediately after the defeat of the Eastern kings. The entire time occupied by the revelation was at the least

[1] The first recorded in Gen. xv., the second in chap. xvii.

[2] For a parallel view of the successive revelations, showing how the promises grew in fulness and explicitness, see Appendix, Note E.

about sixteen hours or so. For it began some hours before dawn, and lasted till after dark on the following evening. During all that protracted period, it is probable that the prophet continued in a state of spiritual exaltation, open to visitings from the world which lies above or outside of the sense-world, though not in any such morbid ecstasy as renders a man incapable of voluntary movements, or insensible to surrounding facts. The series of intermittent revelations opened by a 'vision' to the despondent chief, apparently as he lay rapt in meditation within his tent by night. It was first revealed to him (in words of which we have already spoken) that the Most High, Whose guidance he had thus far followed, undertook to be Himself his true defence against the attacks he feared, and his best reward for exile and wandering. To the sad complaint of Abram, that so long as offspring were denied him, other earthly gifts were vain, the 'word of Jehovah' came to him a second time, with the assurance that a child should be given—issue of his own body—to be his heir. Years before, a similar promise, though one less explicit, had been supported by a reference to the dust of the land of Canaan.[1] Now the

[1] Gen. xiii. 16. Hitherto Abram seems to have supposed that these words, like the still more ambiguous promise in xii. 2 (where the word 'seed' does not occur), might be fulfilled by a tribe inheriting only his wealth, but not his blood.

man is led forth from his tent, to stand in the open air beneath the myriad shining stars of the Syrian sky, the bright uncounted 'dust' of heaven. It is borne in upon him with the certainty of a divine word, that so countless shall his seed be. On these fascinating lights of God's upper world the eyes of his Chaldean kindred had already in that age begun to pore, as mystical characters which revealed, or as mighty agents which accomplished, the will of the Deity; some of his Chaldean fellow-countrymen had even begun to worship them as themselves divine. With propriety, therefore, were they turned into mere illustrators of the blessing reserved for him by the Creator of them all. On that naked and as yet unsupported word of the one true God, the soul of Abram was enabled on that memorable night to count as utterly trustworthy. Out of despondency he burst, as all strong believing natures do, into a new and higher confidence. He grasped as certain the promise of the unlikely. 'He believed God.' And, according to a saying of the sacred historian which was to become a key-note in far later scripture,[1] and a watchword in modern evangelical theology, 'it was counted to him for righteousness.'

Thus far there had been no mention made of any covenant. Neither the thing nor the name

[1] Rom. iv. 3, and Gal. iii. 6.

had as yet entered into the relation of this man to God. The word in which Abram 'believed' was still a bare word, unratified by ceremony or by symbol. Only when the celestial voice passed from the greater promise of the seed, to renew the lesser promise of a land for the seed to dwell in, the confidence of Abram again showed signs of giving way. His wavering did not amount to incredulity. Still it went so far as to beg for a token in confirmation. His desire may have been, that as the promise of a future heir had just been confirmed by a reference to the star-lit sky, so this further promise of the heir's inheritance should be sustained by some parallel token obvious to the senses. If this were his meaning, the craving was natural enough. Weak faith must needs grope after material supports. It is noticeable that it was to such weak faith—real, yet groping—God granted, what had certainly not been asked for, the magnificent confirmation of a covenant.

Five animals, representing all the species commonly offered in worship,—an heifer, a goat, a ram, and two doves,—Abram was bidden to select when daylight came, and to set apart for a sacrifice *on God's behalf*.[1] In these last words lay the unprecedented feature of this ceremony. The ceremony itself was one commonly ob-

[1] 'Take for me,' etc., Gen. xv. 9.

served, so far as we can judge, by the negotiators of that day in the formal ratification of a compact. Here, however, it is not Abram or any human party, but God Himself, Who by this solemn formality binds Himself, to the contract. The transaction assumes the shape of a concession on the part of the high celestial Covenanter, in order that the man may 'know,' as he has petitioned to know, that the word of the Eternal may be absolutely trusted.

In the morning, it would seem that Abram, by divine instructions, selected, slaughtered, and divided the animals, laying the severed portions of them over against one another, with a narrow interval between. The formal act to which usage attached a ratifying virtue was the passage of the contracting party betwixt the severed halves. It is supposed to have denoted that the two allies in the treaty were no longer to be two, but one; though it must be confessed that such a sense is not very clearly to be found in it, and that such hypothetical explanations are precarious. Whatever it signified, this essential act of ratification did not at once take place. All through the hot day Abram continued to sit beside God's sacrifice, in silent meditation, not presuming to carry to its further stage a ceremony in which the Almighty was the actor, but watching for some further intimation from his august interlocutor. No voice or

vision came. When unclean vultures, attracted by the scent of carrion (as in that climate they were sure to be), drew together as to a feast, Abram was content to scare them from the carcases. Still, no voice or vision came. God never works in haste. At length, as the sun was going down, the watcher, wearied out (like a certain three in a garden) with the heat, sank into a deep sleep. It is hard to watch with God. But in his sleep he dreamt. A dense and awful gloom seemed to enclose him after the burning glare he had endured all day. Against the background of thick darkness, symbol of suffering, there were probably pictured for him successive glimpses into the future destiny of his race—glimpses which a divine voice interpreted to his ear.[1] He saw his descendants exiled in a foreign country. He saw them enslaved by the foreigner, and cruelly handled. Three ages of men, as men at that time reckoned ages, passed slowly away. In the fourth, deliverance arose; the wrongs of his children were avenged; their tribes returned to the land of promise. The moral reason for such a long delay he also learned. Some of the Canaanites, such as the cities he had recently saved, were already ripe for destruction;

[1] The 'voice' only is named in the record; but from the revelation being made in slumber, I have ventured to suppose that a dream accompanied the words.

but not all of them. Mountaineers, like his own confederates at Hebron, were not yet so far corrupted as to have forfeited all claim to longer forbearance, or made immediate overthrow a moral necessity. It is God indeed, Who, at His pleasure, sets up one and pulls down another. He takes Canaan from the Canaanites to give it to the seed of Abram. He withdraws from one state its pre-eminence and political power, that He may plant another in its room. So He is doing to-day as He did it then. But this earthly rule of His is a moral and righteous rule, tempered with mercy; it is no arbitrary despotism. Wherever we may have to look for an explanation of the divine preferences in history, therefore, it is not to be found in favouritism. I cannot conceive a lesson which so select a friend of Heaven as Abram might more need to learn than this. Not even to carve out a land for the seed of the covenant will 'the Judge of all the earth' do a partial or unrighteous thing, or curtail by a generation the possible lifetime of a people, or sacrifice prematurely the children of Canaan for the children of Abram.[1]

Abram awoke. The sun had set. Darkness of the starry night, a night without moon, fell upon the slaughtered sacrifices, and the solitary,

[1] Notice the effect of this teaching coming out in the pleadings of Abram for Sodom in chap. xviii. especially ver. 25.

awe-struck watcher. Then at last came, in the solemn stillness and silence that hushed all the camp, the awful act of ratification. For the first time since man left the gates of Eden, there appeared the glory of God—that luminous symbol of the divine presence with which the children of Abram were afterwards to become familiar. What Moses was to witness as a burning but unconsumed bush, and the tribes as a pillar of cloud enwrapping fire, appeared now to Abram as a furnace with red flame at the heart of it, but sending up into the night a dense and lurid column of smoke. In the thick darkness this strange apparition glided along the narrow lane which divided the portions of the sacrifice; and thus, before the eyes of His human friend and ally, it pleased Jehovah in His condescension to bind Himself for ever, as a man does, to the promises of His grace.

IX.

HAGAR.

THE SONS OF ISHMAEL DWELT FROM HAVILAH UNTO SHUR, THAT IS BEFORE EGYPT, AS THOU GOEST TOWARD ASSYRIA.

THE SONS OF REUBEN MADE WAR WITH THE HAGARITES, WHO FELL BY THEIR HAND; AND THEY DWELT IN THEIR TENTS THROUGHOUT ALL THE EAST LAND OF GILEAD.

THIS AGAR IS MOUNT SINAI IN ARABIA, AND ANSWERETH TO JERUSALEM WHICH NOW IS, AND IS IN BONDAGE WITH HER CHILDREN.

IX.

HAGAR.

THE league of friendship which it had pleased the Most High to contract with Abram was not entered into with him as a private individual, standing alone, but as the head and destined progenitor of a nation. Yet his marriage had been so long unblessed with issue, that he had begun to entertain the idea of an adopted heir, in despair of one sprung from his own body. This idea was dissipated by a divine communication which preceded the first formation of the covenant: 'He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.'[1] These words left no doubt that Abram should become a father; but they said nothing to indicate that Sarai was to be a mother. No sooner had such a discovery of the divine will been made, than it began to press upon this high-minded princess that her proved unfruitfulness was the obstacle which

[1] Gen. xv. 4.

obstructed the fulfilment of the promise. During more than ten years[1] had she and her husband hoped against hope, looking for the birth which should crown their union. For this she would hope no longer. Abram, with that calm power of waiting which lay at the base of his character, might prefer to abide some further indication of Heaven's pleasure. His more impulsive partner could not bear the thought of standing in the way. Conquering her womanly shame, and abdicating her wifely rights, she began to urge her husband to seek through other means the attainment of the promise.

There was something to blame in this. God's promises are for Himself to fulfil in His own way, not for us to expedite in ours. The unhasting hope of the husband was a nobler and wiser reply to divine grace than the generous impatience of the wife. Still, Sarai's impulse, even if mistaken, was admirable for its unselfish abnegation of what is most precious to her sex. It was such a sacrifice as only a woman had it in her power to make. Had Abram been a polygamist, or had the adhesion of his house to the primitive marriage law been less loyal than it was, there was one obvious escape from the difficulty. It is instructive that neither Abram nor his wife thought of a

[1] See Appendix, Note D.

second marriage. The usages of the time suggested a different mode. For a childless wife to treat the children born of a favourite slave-girl as legally her own was a resource very foreign to the notions of our western Christendom. Nevertheless, it sprang not unnaturally out of two peculiarities of society in Abram's day. One of these was the disadvantage, amounting positively to social discredit, which attached to childlessness, at a time when the primeval injunction to replenish the earth still retained its full force. The other was the complete surrender of a serf's legal and social rights into the hand of his master, which in the East characterized domestic servitude. Every home-slave stood at the disposal of his lord for whatever service the lord might require. His very children were not his own, but his master's. For a mistress, therefore, to seek by means of a female slave and favourite attendant what Providence had denied to herself, was regarded under such a state of feeling as neither immoral nor revolting. It was not even held to be any real departure from the law of monogamy, or any infraction of conjugal fidelity. There is no doubt, however, that it did involve a certain lowering of the original conception of marriage. It paved the way for concubinage of a less excusable description. And in the majority of cases, as in the present instance, it could

scarcely fail to turn out ill. Human nature will assert its instincts against whatever violence may be done to it by the artificial arrangements of society.

The Egyptian Hagar had probably lived in the household of Sarai ever since Abram's visit to Egypt, and may well have proved a compliant and obeisant maid so long as she was not lifted above her place. But all the woman rose up in her when she believed herself about to become the mother of the desired heir. From the handmaid, she at once aspired to be the rival, of her mistress. Her proud southern blood despised the barren wife. It was a delicate enough situation for all parties, and we can hardly wonder that the spirit of the chieftainess found it easier to yield to a generous impulse than to endure in cold blood the daily pain which such generosity entailed. In point of fact, Sarai's character showed itself under the provocation in a new and unpleasant light. Severe to her slave, she became unjust to her husband. Because he did not at once interfere as she wished, she put on him the blame of what had occurred, and reproached him in bitter words as the real author of her indignities. Naturally, Abram must have been reluctant to bear hardly upon the future mother of his child. At the same time, he perfectly respected the just rights of Sarai, both as

mistress and as wife. Hagar was still as much as ever no rival of the lawful spouse, but simply her slave, and as a slave was entirely at her disposal. A more magnanimous woman might have spared the sister whom she had herself thrust into a position of difficulty; but this Chaldean princess was not above showing unhandsome spite where her woman's pride had been touched to the quick. She made the girl's life so bitter, that at last Hagar fairly ran away from her master's encampment, and fled towards her native land of Egypt.

One well-known and welcome fountain broke to the traveller of that age his monotonous march across the barren interval which divides the rolling pastures on the south-west of Hebron from the nearest green corner of Egypt. At this oasis on the route to Shur was the weary runaway reposing, when, in the childlike phrase of the old Book, 'the Angel of the Lord found her.' It is the first time we encounter this solemn title, which afterward recurs so often, not only in the Pentateuch, but in the prophets of the Old Testament and the early narratives of the New. Whether, under every appearance which bears this name of 'the Messenger of Jehovah,' we ought to understand a real theophany or manifestation of the eternal Word and Son of God, clothed by anticipation with such a human form as He was destined ultimately to

assume into personal union with Himself; or only some angelic creature of more than usual dignity, commissioned to represent for the occasion the majesty of the Godhead, and therefore entitled to speak and act with delegated authority in the divine name;—this long-disputed question is one on which, in my judgment, it is still rash to pronounce with confidence.[1] The evidence of the Pentateuch, if it stood alone, would incline us to the former alternative; that of later scripture to the latter. But, after all, the dispute does not greatly affect our reading of the narrative. It is of importance in the light of the incarnation, and of New Testament theology, rather than in its bearing upon the patriarchal history; for, on either alternative, this celestial visitor bore the immediate impress of God's authority. He not only carried a message, like all angels who appeared of old; he personally assumed to represent the Deity, and acted as His vicegerent. It was therefore no extravagant degree of awe which oppressed the spirit of the poor half-heathen slave. Her surprise was natural that, after seeing, as she said, 'the face of God,' she should survive to behold the light of day. Her ancestral divinities in Egypt were all invisible gods, over whom there hung a veil of silence and of mystery, which no

[1] The reader will find some further particulars on this point in the Appendix, under Note F.

mortal was permitted to raise. Their shrines were dark recesses, accessible to no foot of profane, uninitiated worshipper. But this Jehovah, Whom she knew as her master's friend, was, as she now confessed, a 'God of vision': One Who could see, and could be seen. Not only had He seen her, a lonely fugitive by the desert well, far from the tents of men, but He permitted Himself to be seen of her in grace. Not only could He foresee the birth that was to be, with all its hidden issues in the long hereafter, but He could reveal to mortals what only the immortals know. Impressed by this discovery of God,—to her an unknown God till now,—her woman's wit conferred upon Jehovah a new name. 'Thou art,' said she, 'the God of seeing,' with the vague or double sense underlying the words which I have just endeavoured to express. For she said: 'Here have I also seen, even after seeing Him!' To have beheld the self-revealing God, and yet live—this made to her mind the marvel of that hour. In after days the fountain is said to have received its name in recollection of the woman's words. It came to be known as Beer-Lahai-Roi, 'The Well of Living and of Seeing.'[1]

In this very gracious appearance of the angel to Hagar, it is possible, I think, to detect

[1] Such seems to me the best sense to be made out of this passage, Gen. xvi. 13, 14. It must be owned, however, that it is (possibly from its archaic brevity) somewhat obscure and hard to interpret.

a twofold design. Through her connection with Abram, this handmaid had been providentially elevated into a position which carried on the one hand duties, and on the other honour. In the first place, it was her present duty to return and place herself again under the heavy hand of Sarai, in order that Abram's son might be born and nurtured in Abram's home. This, therefore, was the hard command, which in the first instance the angel was commissioned to deliver. God's revelations commonly attach themselves to the working of men's own minds. It is impossible not to suspect that, as she sat to rest after her hasty flight, Hagar's conscience was already whispering words like these before the angel appeared: 'Return to thy mistress and submit thyself!' But if any such feeling worked dimly in her own mind, it would certainly have failed to send her back, had it not been sharpened by this imperative from Heaven. On the other side, God graciously encouraged Hagar to such an unwelcome duty, by revealing the honours which her relationship to Abram would bring along with it. When God blesses any man, that blessing proves itself like the consecrating oil on the Jewish high priest: it flows from the head down to the skirts of the garment.[1] In recompense for a mistress' cruelty, Hagar was to be-

[1] Ps. cxxxiii. 2.

come the ancestress of a mighty race, which for countless generations has ever since dwelt in the presence of all its brethren. Lifting the curtain from the future, the angel sketched in vivid colours the characteristics of her unborn boy, as these have continued from that day to this to mark the long history of the mixed Arab races, of the Saracen, of the Bedawin.

> 'A wild ass of a man will he be:
> His hand against every man,
> And every man's hand against him!
> And in the presence of all his brethren shall be his dwelling.' [1]

That wide desert which has the Euphrates valley to the east of it, and the Jordan valley to the west of it, has been always tenanted by wandering, hunting tribes of Ishmaelites, as untameable as the wild ass described in the Book of Job,[2] which finds in the same barren regions its habitat. Like it, these men of the desert have always 'scorned the city crowds,' and, 'searching the range of their stony mountains for some green thing' to live by, have preferred the precarious licence of the wilderness to 'regarding the cry of any driver.' Again and again have they been hunted down by invading armies;

[1] Gen. xvi. 12.

[2] See Job xxxix. 5–8, if the word employed there refer to the same animal (*asinus hemippus*). See Delitzsch *on Job*, and Tristram, *Nat. Hist. of Bible*.

but neither the Macedonian, nor the Roman, nor the Turk has been able to establish a settled rule over their inaccessible and inhospitable wastes. Again and again have their predatory hordes swept over adjacent states; but neither have they been willing to exchange the free air of the desert for the restraints of a settled community. Broken up for ever into petty tribes at endless feud with one another, the words of prophecy have actually grown into a proverb of their own: 'In the desert,' say the Bedawin, 'every one is the enemy of every one else!' Most unchangeable of races, they dwell where they have always dwelt, 'in the presence of all their brethren,' stable in their instability, while empire has succeeded empire, and civilisation has grown upon the ruins of preceding civilisations. With characteristic fidelity have their own unwritten traditions handed down the memory of their boasted descent from the 'father of multitudes,' through him whose birth was announced by the angel at the fountain.

X.

THE COVENANT RENEWED.

HE GAVE HIM THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION.

HE RECEIVED THE SIGN OF CIRCUMCISION, A SEAL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE FAITH WHICH HE HAD YET BEING UNCIRCUMCISED; THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FATHER OF ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE, THOUGH THEY BE NOT CIRCUMCISED; THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS MIGHT BE IMPUTED UNTO THEM ALSO.

THE LORD THY GOD WILL CIRCUMCISE THINE HEART, AND THE HEART OF THY SEED, TO LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THINE HEART.

WE ARE THE CIRCUMCISION, WHICH WORSHIP GOD IN THE SPIRIT, AND REJOICE IN CHRIST JESUS, AND HAVE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH.

X.

THE COVENANT RENEWED.

FROM his birth, Ishmael was regarded by his father as the promised heir. During a period of not less than thirteen years, he grew up as the hope of his parents, and the young master of that vast pastoral household. A free, brave, wilful boy he must have been, fit lord for a tribe of nomadic herdsmen. At length, and, so far as we know, quite suddenly, there came a day when the long silence of Heaven was once more broken. A second time God appeared, to repeat His promises with greater explicitness than before, and to seal by a sacramental symbol His servant's adhesion to the covenant.

In substance, the earlier promises to which God had bound Himself by the night ceremony thirteen years before were reiterated on this second occasion. But they were reiterated with an amplitude and completeness which had never been approached. All the three items or

factors in the divine intentions with respect to this man were now disentangled from one another, and expressed with such formal elaborateness of statement as might almost suggest the phraseology of a legal document. These three, to put them most briefly, were the promises of the Seed, of the Land, and of the Blessing.

1. First, a most numerous and wide-branching posterity was secured by the contract. Already it had been again and again promised—first in Haran, next at Bethel, and last at Mamre. The fullest expression was now given to it in these words: 'Thou shalt be a father of many nations . . . I will make thee exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of thee; and kings shall come out of thee.'[1] The intimation that the descendants of the patriarch should not be confined to a single line of descent was new, and was no doubt designed to prepare his mind for that promise of a second son with which the present vision was to conclude. The reference to a royal line of posterity linked itself on to the expectation of a settlement for his race in the land; while it served to stimulate the imagination of the man, to whom all this splendid future was a matter only of hearsay and of trust. Imagination is the handmaid of faith; and men commonly credit more easily the great future

[1] Gen. xvii. 4-6.

foreshadowed of God, when their souls are lifted above the commonplace and kindled into fervid hope. It was in connection with this department of the covenant, and in memory of it, that Abram received a new name. So long as proper names continued to carry any significance with them, or to be, strictly speaking, peculiar to the individuals who bore them, so long did they retain a value, which, from our use of them, we can barely appreciate. Even among ourselves the adoption of another name serves in one case at least to mark an epoch in personal experience; I mean in the case of those who accept the vows of a religious order. Their withdrawal from the world to the convent is still signalized by this ancient expedient. The bestowal of a new name in baptism once served a similar purpose, and among converts from heathendom it still does so. In the instance of Abram, both the sound and the sense of his original Semitic appellation lent themselves very readily to the alteration now made upon it. A very slight change only [1] was needed to form a name which, while recalling his birth-name by its close resemblance to it, should yet prove a continual reminder and pledge of the new prospects which God had opened out for his family. Abram became Abraham. The clan chieftain passed into the founder of mighty nations. To be

[1] When written in Hebrew, it is only the insertion of a single letter.

called 'Father of a multitude' was not a reward attached to his confidence in the divine assurances, so much as a gracious attestation and memorial of them. It made it easier, so to say, to keep alive his confidence in the future, when the very name by which other men addressed him was itself a standing pledge of that future, given from Heaven.

2. All the territory of Canaan was once more declared to be the destined possession of his seed. Its limits, indeed, were not again defined with the same geographical minuteness as on the first formation of the covenant,[1] but the tenure of the inheritance was made as enduring as words could make it: 'I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession.' It was only at the most flourishing moment in the history of the Hebrew nation, during the brief period when the extensive empire conquered by David's sword still lay beneath the peaceful sceptre of his son, that the frontiers of the land of Israel touched or even approached the very wide boundary-lines indicated in the original deed of gift. So far as tenure goes, the people have long since ceased to enjoy the land which was intended to be their 'everlasting possession.' No blessing which God covenants to bestow, least of all an

[1] See Gen. xv. 18–21.

outward or earthly one, can be reckoned upon in total disregard of those moral conditions which on man's side must bind him to God. The failure of the Jews to fulfil their part, which was trustful and obedient service to God, has led of necessity to a forfeiture of their claim upon the land, as their own prophets clearly saw and loudly taught.[1] It may turn out that for the land as well as for the people, so long and closely bound together in one, a future is yet reserved in store. But if it be, it must come through a religious reformation. The renewal of that devout, affectionate, and submissive attitude toward God and His will, by which their founder and representative obtained the blessing at the first, must be the condition of any restoration to the chosen nationality of its destined and chosen territory.

3. Was it to indicate such a dependence of those other and more external promises upon spiritual conditions, that betwixt the announcement of the Seed, and the promise of the Land, there lay embedded at the heart of this most formal edition of God's covenant the religious bond which alone can lend to material advantages all their value? The third element in the

[1] See, for example, Jeremiah *passim;* compare especially passages like xi. 1–10, xxii. 8, 9, xxxi. 32, xxxii. 21–23. The result of age-long refusal to yield those moral results which their privileged position aimed at securing, foreshadowed by Isaiah (v. 1–7), was plainly foretold at last by our Lord (Matt. xxi. 33–44).

divine purpose with Abraham had up till this time been only vaguely pointed at as the 'Blessing.'[1] It now assumed the shape of a thorough reconciliation betwixt the man and his Maker,—such a covenant between the two as gives the man who is faithful to it a claim upon God, entitling him to count upon Him as in a special sense his God. Thus ran the wonderful words: 'I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.'[2] There lay the heart and kernel of the whole. It is the heart of all the deepest experiences of the saints, from that day to this. It is the 'blessing' which wraps up within it every other divine benefit, and makes our earthly boons to be blessings indeed. That God did bind Himself to act as God—their God—towards this man and his posterity; to bless them; to make them channels of blessing for mankind; to be all and do all for their advantage that a friendly, propitious God can do or be for His fallen human children;—here was the magnificent and quite inexhaustible treasure of this amazing treaty. *In gremio* it held nothing short of the salvation of mankind, destined to come through the race which should spring of this man's seed, and chiefly through that special 'Seed' in Whom the long

[1] See Gen. xii. 2, 3. [2] Gen. xvii. 7.

desire and travail of his race should at last reach its final birth.

Abraham's acceptance of God's voluntary word, by which He pledged Himself to all this, had already made Abraham also a free party to the treaty. Implicitly he had been so on its first formation, thirteen years before. He was now to become so by explicit act of ratification. On the earlier occasion, it was the Divine Party in the covenant Who, as the gracious originator of it, bound Himself to its observance by a solemn ceremony, — the passage of the glory between the sacrifices. Now it was His human friend, elevated to the dignity of a covenanter with God, who was called upon to accept his share of obligation, and bind himself to its performance by a parallel ceremony—the symbolic rite of circumcision.

It has to be noted with care, that not until the promises of God had all been, not merely recited, but for a long while accepted by the tacit faith of the patriarch, did he receive any command touching circumcision. To this order in the events St. Paul calls attention as significant.[1] Faith precedes the sacramental seal; and the man's acceptance in God's sight as His covenanted friend hangs upon his faith, and is synchronous with that, not with his circum-

[1] In Rom. iv. 9–12.

cision. The sign which attested on man's side his adhesion to the alliance and his acceptance of the blessing, was no more than 'a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised.' It is the uniform order of the divine dealings with fallen man. Grace comes first; for God must volunteer the blessing which through sin we have forfeited. Fresh from heaven it comes, clothing itself in kindly human words of promise, and in its lowliness accepting the confirmatory form of a treaty. On such grace of God rests next the obedient faith of man. Of all help or interposition from Heaven, the first condition must be, not man's doing, but man's expectant hope of what God will do. God gave all His blessings to Abraham by promise, as an apostle expounds,[1] on purpose that they might be conditioned merely by this trust in the Promiser. He gave them thus to faith, in order that their origin might visibly be, not human merit, but divine favour. It is by such trustful reception of the divine word that any man becomes in the first instance a party to this strange contract. For it lies in the nature of a promise that it constitutes a contract or binding understanding betwixt two, so soon as the receiver reckons on and claims its fulfilment by the promiser. What God undertakes to do may indeed bind Him, whether a man

[1] Compare Paul's whole argument on this point, in Gal. iii. 7–18.

believe it or not, if what He has undertaken be a thing wholly irrespective of any second party. But His promises of grace are not of this character. And what makes me also a party to the undertaking, or gives me any lien or covenant hold on the Divine Promiser, is this, that I credit His word and claim at His hand the fulfilment of it. To all men who will, like Abraham, trust God's promise on His naked word, and cling to that as their sole and sufficient hope, God's faithfulness is pledged.

It is from this point of view, as I conceive, that one gets to see the force and reasonableness of that profound and memorable word: Abraham 'believed in Jehovah, and He counted that to him for righteousness.'[1] The simple, childlike trust which even in uncircumcision Abram was enabled to repose in the promises of God's favour, did what only a perfect 'righteousness' of his own could have done under the original compact with unfallen Adam. That is to say, it brought him back, sinner as he was, into a position of friendship and favour with God; and it gave him a claim upon such divine help and benediction as it must be the supreme reward of all 'righteousness' to attain. Personal righteousness, in the sense of such a faultless obedience to divine law as might have deserved the friendship or the blessing of the righteous Judge, Abraham

[1] Gen. xv. 6, quoted in Rom. iv. 3 ff., Gal. iii. 6 ff., and Jas. ii. 23.

of course had none, any more than any of us. But what he could not win from justice by his righteousness, that the grace of Jehovah granted to his trustfulness. For, so soon as the man trusted Jehovah's word of friendly promise, he became a party to a covenant of reconciliation, and obtained a title to its blessings. By making him a party to such a contract of friendship, his faith made Abraham a 'friend' of God, and God the God of Abraham. He became a reconciled ally of his once offended Lord. Thus the beneficent and merciful One above, and the sinful but repentant one beneath, came together in an unequal yet most fruitful compact. Its terms were simple enough: whatever God on His side undertook to do, *that* man on his side counted on having done for him by God. But its issues were infinite. Nor do I know on what better or happier footing the holiest of the unfallen servants of Jehovah could ever stand; even as to this hour there is for none of us any standing more secure or blessed. That covenant with Abraham is in essence the new covenant of our peace, which has been sealed by the blood of Abraham's Seed.

One further step only remains to bring out the contents of the covenant which circumcision was to seal. A man's acceptance of this new and blessed standing as God's friend, and of God as his God, bound to him by promise,

binds the man *ipso facto* to a corresponding attitude and behaviour. God had chosen Abraham to be His friend. If Abraham accept such a lofty title, he must walk in friendship with God. Jehovah had pledged Himself to be the God of Abraham. If Abraham receive such a pledge, he must faithfully own and serve Jehovah as his God. A loyal, obedient, worshipful attitude towards this gracious Covenanter is implied in the very act of becoming a party to His covenant. The importance of this result, now to be no longer implied but expressed between the parties, is indicated by the prominence given to it in the new revelation of the seventeenth chapter. Before the details of the divine engagement fall to be recited, the interview is prefaced by these words, which must be viewed as a summary of the whole in its outstanding lines: 'I am EL SHADDAI: walk before Me and be perfect, and I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.'[1] The force of the new name here assumed by God, and its bearing on the closing words of promise, will have to be noticed presently. Meanwhile, let the moral terms virtually imposed upon the human party in this agreement be carefully observed. To 'walk before the face or presence of God,' meant to order his daily life and behaviour according to

[1] Gen. xvii. 1, 2.

His will, so as to retain His friendly approval. To be 'perfect' in this holy bond of amity meant to adhere to it with an undivided, unseduced loyalty, mingling his service of Jehovah El Shaddai, Who had spoken to him, with no secret hankering after other divinities, nor any unquiet misgivings as to the trustworthiness of Jehovah's word. Considering the stage of revelation at which Abraham stood, it covered all that an upright and sincere heart could feel to be incumbent on it in the sight of God, the heart-searching Judge of men.

Thus at last the wondrous league stood ready for its final ratification. Promise on God's part had been carefully expanded into express and ample terms, and ratified by a covenant symbol. Faith in that promise on the man's part had made him no less a real party to the transaction; and such faith, with all its moral results, had been clearly stipulated as the condition of the divine fulfilment. What remained but for the human covenanter to attest and seal his share, as the Divine Covenanter had done, by a covenant symbol?

It is probable, I think, that circumcision was no new rite, then for the first time invented, but a most ancient and widespread usage of heathen worship, with which Abraham may have become acquainted in Egypt, if not even in Chaldea.

The evidence for its use at such a very early date is not indeed conclusive. But its distribution over the globe, and the notices of its employment in Egypt and elsewhere to be found in profane authorities, appear to me to be best explained on such a supposition.[1] It seems not out of keeping, but rather in accordance with divine procedure, that a rite which had become associated with false conceptions of religion should be redeemed from misuse, and consecrated to teach a purer faith. In its heathen significance it was certainly saturated with that worship of the forces of the physical world in which probably polytheism took its rise, and with polytheism nearly all the religions and mythologies of antiquity. It bore very directly on the deification of the generative or reproductive virtue in nature—the foul source of much that was cruel and nearly all that was obscene in the mysteries of paganism. Transferred to holy soil, and attached to a covenant of grace, it implied an acknowledgment that God, Who is above nature, and not any natural force whatever, is the true Author of physical life and its

[1] The practice is found among savage tribes in South Africa and the Pacific, where it cannot have been derived from the Abrahamic stock. It first appears in Ethiopia, then in Egypt, where at a very early period it must have assumed, if it did not from the first possess, a religious character, for the priests retained it when disused by others. (Nothing can with certainty be inferred from Josh. v. 9.) Its connection, at least in some instances, with the worship of the reproductive forces of nature is beyond a doubt.

increase; the sovereign Giver of fertility; above all, the only Quickener of a holy or consecrated life. It taught that what is born of the flesh can only be flesh. It suggested that it is by the painful renunciation of fleshly desire and natural self-confidence, man must be surrendered to God's service as His fit instrument for gracious ends. Finally, it served to point forward to one pure and superhuman birth, through which alone the fatal chain that links in one the sinful generations of mankind could be severed, and a new fountain of salvation and blessing opened for the fallen race. The adoption of this rite of circumcision, to mark man's share in the sacred bond which was to bring down Heaven's grace upon believers, told how man's whole natural life needed a painful purification ere it could be elevated to new and spiritual and godly uses. It was like a symbol carved upon the very flesh of Abraham, to tell him that his entire being, even in its merely animal basis of physical desires and physical powers, was claimed for the service of that God Who had called him to be His friend. This rite, which was once, in the words of Dean Stanley, 'so honourable and so sacred,' is 'now so entirely removed alike from honour and from sanctity,'[1] that it is hard for modern minds to realize its significance to men of a ruder time, hard even to explain it in

[1] *Lectures on the Jewish Church*, i. 24.

language which modern ears will bear. Still, no one will fail to see, in its bloody and ineffaceable character, a solemn reading of the immemorial lesson, that not without stern subjugation of the animal nature, with its irregular desires, to the sanctifying grace of God, can our bodies become again organs of His will for holy purposes. Scarcely less legible is the still deeper lesson, that God's work as the saving God of the covenant and of the blessing is not to be wrought by the will of the flesh, not in man's self-chosen methods nor through man's natural strength, but only then when the self-distrustful soul, conscious of its own helplessness, lays itself at the disposal of a Power and a Wisdom beyond its own.

It is by no means necessary to imagine that all this became clear to Abraham when first the heavenly voice prescribed circumcision as the test of his loyalty to the covenant, or even after he had found leisure to reflect upon its meaning. At the same time, he probably possessed a key to explain it, if he knew what ideas underlay its employment by men of other faiths. Providence itself was preparing a commentary which must have cast back upon it a still more suggestive light. For we cannot fail to trace some connection between a ceremony so peculiar as this, and the miraculous birth which was immediately afterwards promised to the patriarch.

The very first consequence of Abraham's circumcision was, that he became past all expectation or natural possibility the father of a God-given child, a seed of promise, sanctified from the womb, and born, first of all men, into the covenant of God, as into an inheritance by birth. We at least know how that promised son was but a foreshadow and prophecy of another far better 'Seed of Abraham,' Who also was to be conceived and born by a miracle, and through Whom, as the fruit or outcome of the long centuries, was at length to be amply fulfilled, in all its most splendid reaches of meaning, the ancient blessing promised to all the nations of the earth. Isaac, as the miraculous child of barren Sarah, is in his birth a prefigure of Jesus, the divine Son of Mary the virgin.

XI.

THE CHILD OF MIRACLE.

HE STAGGERED NOT AT THE PROMISE OF GOD THROUGH UNBELIEF, BUT WAS STRONG IN FAITH, GIVING GLORY TO GOD, AND BEING FULLY PERSUADED THAT WHAT HE HAD PROMISED, HE WAS ABLE ALSO TO PERFORM.

THROUGH FAITH ALSO SARAH HERSELF RECEIVED STRENGTH TO CONCEIVE SEED, AND WAS DELIVERED OF A CHILD WHEN SHE WAS PAST AGE, BECAUSE SHE JUDGED HIM FAITHFUL WHO HAD PROMISED.

HE WHO WAS OF THE BOND WOMAN WAS BORN AFTER THE FLESH; BUT HE OF THE FREE WOMAN WAS BY PROMISE.

XI.

THE CHILD OF MIRACLE.

WHETHER it was on the same occasion or not, can scarcely be affirmed with confidence; but it was not until the covenant had been sanctioned afresh, and its ratification, through the permanent sacramental act of circumcision, prescribed, that at length there broke upon Abraham the startling announcement that Sarai should bear a son.[1] It was at first an unwelcome announcement. Men's hopes for their children twine themselves closely about their parental affections. To bear the shattering of a cherished and fond anticipation is like a wound to love itself. To transfer from his boy the great hope of his line, after indulging in it through so many years, meant a wrench to the father's heart. For this fresh sacrifice of natural feeling there must have been good reasons in those high purposes of grace, with which the domestic fortunes of this chosen man were to be inextricably bound up.

[1] See Gen. xvii. 15-22.

Two reasons in particular seem to have made it unsuitable, or even incompatible with the divine purposes, that Ishmael should be the continuator of the sacred line, and the inheritor of that blessing for mankind which had been secured to Abraham by covenant.

For one thing, Ishmael was slave-born. The children of a slave mother shared her condition, even when the father was a free man—indeed, though he were the master himself. In the absence of any issue by the free and proper wife, it is true that Ishmael could have inherited his father's wealth, just as, in the absence of any issue, Eliezer of Damascus might have done so. Inherently, however, he possessed no right of inheritance. So soon as a free-born son appeared, Ishmael sank to his mother's level. In our Lord's own words, he was 'the slave,' who 'abideth not in the house for ever,' because he has not a true son's indefeasible claim upon the estate.[1] His position in his father's home was actually proved a few years later to be as precarious as these words describe it; a position dependent only on accident or on favour, not on birthright. It is easy to see how unfit such an heir would have been to represent, at the very outset of a family history

[1] See John viii. 33–36, where the argument unquestionably contains an allusion to the relative positions of Ishmael and of Isaac. The word rendered 'servant' is of course δοῦλος, or slave.

which was to be saturated throughout with symbolical meaning, the entire body of God's spiritual children, for whom the great blessing was ultimately destined.

In the second place, God's covenant with Abraham's seed was one of gracious promise. By it, the Eternal and Omnipotent drew near again to sinful men, laden with spontaneous blessings, such as they themselves could neither win by force nor merit by virtue, but must expect to receive through the superhuman operations of God. The Promiser of such blessings must be also their Donor. The fulfilment of a divine promise, whose characteristic is sovereign grace, could not lie within the sphere of man's natural ability, or what in Bible language is called 'flesh.' It lay outside that region altogether; in a redemptive, and therefore miraculous, interposition of God. Now it corresponded ill with an alliance like this, that the first to inherit and transmit its benefits or hopes to posterity should be one into whose origin there had entered so little faith, and so much fleshly policy and fleshly desire. Ishmael was not merely slave-born; he was, in an eminent degree, born 'after the flesh.'[1] The physical conditions of his birth certainly did not rise above the sphere of natural forces. Neither did its moral conditions. It was brought about by the defective

[1] Gal. iv. 23.

religious trust and natural impatience of Sarai, by the yielding of Abraham to seek through his wife's contrivance what God had promised, and by the servile and compulsory submission of Hagar to be the instrument of their will. If ever a child was born 'of blood, and of the will of the flesh,' Ishmael was; but not to such as these, says St. John, does God grant the privilege of being His sons.[1] In any case, it would have been out of harmony with a covenant, whose essence lay in promises of Heaven's free grace, to seek an heir for it through human contrivance. It was pre-eminently out of keeping with this covenant, because a seed to inherit it actually formed the foremost among the blessings which it promised. In the forefront of His engagements to Abraham, his divine Friend had set this one—a son, in whom was to lie a blessing for all nations. How could Abraham think to compass that prime gift of the heavenly Covenanter through the generous ingenuity of his wife, and the subservience of a slave-girl?

In considerations like these we may seek an explanation of that perplexing delay in the birth of Isaac which sorely tried the endurance of Abraham. The son of promise had to be the gift of superhuman grace. Not only free-born and a lawful heir, he must be also a child of faith, and a child of miracle. Now, when Abram entered

[1] John i. 12. 13.

Canaan, he was seventy-five years of age, and his wife was sixty-five. As we reckon human age, neither was any longer young; yet they retained vitality enough, according to the slower decay of that long-lived period, to cherish a hope of offspring. Such a hope must have expired as the slow years went past. Five-and-twenty years had now elapsed since then. During the last thirteen of these, Sarai had so far surrendered her expectation of becoming a mother, that she had been content to see her husband settle his affections and his hopes on the son of the Egyptian. By this time, a child of their marriage was become, according to the usual laws of life, a physical impossibility.[1] Nothing short of His power, Who plants in human bodies their vital force at the beginning, could re-create youthful vigour in the exhausted frames of this pair. It is no wonder that, when God designed to demand of His aged servants faith in so improbable an announcement, He should have prefaced the oracle by proclaiming as His new name EL SHADDAI—God the Almighty One. For the only key that will unlock such a difficulty as this—it is in effect the standing difficulty of our age, the presence of the supernatural among the sequences of nature—lies in these words of a Greater than Abraham: 'The

[1] This is put beyond doubt by the express words of Gen. xviii. 11. Compare Rom. iv. 19; Heb. xi. 11.

things which are impossible with men are possible with God.'[1] 'Is anything too hard for Jehovah,'[2] if the Jehovah Who is Abraham's God be indeed El Shaddai, the all-powerful Maker and Lord of nature, the Quickener of all things, Who vivifies the dead, and calls the things that are not as though they were?[3]

It is when all this is remembered that the strength of Abraham's faith appears so extraordinary. Even in his mind, the earliest unlooked-for announcement of the birth provoked a startled incredulity. 'He fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to one who is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah that is ninety years old bear?"'[4] This natural difficulty in the way of believing it, which was so obvious that it occurred at once, came to be increased so soon as he remembered how the promised birth would affect the prospects of Ishmael. It is easier for men to believe in the unlikely when they have a strong reason for desiring it. Abraham was told to expect, not the unlikely, but the unnatural;

[1] Our Lord's words in Luke xviii. 27; reported with no substantial alteration in Matt. xix. 26 and Mark x. 27. Compare the angel's words respecting the birth of John the Baptist, in Luke i. 37.

[2] See Gen. xviii. 14.

[3] So St. Paul describes this aspect of the divine might, in which Abraham was required to trust in order to become the father of the promised seed. See Rom. iv. 16–22.

[4] Gen. xvii. 17.

and that when he had not only ceased to desire it, but had long settled his desires elsewhere. To let Ishmael go in order to look for another, when it seemed flat against nature and reason that any other should be born, was the severest strain to which even this athlete of the religious life, this hero of faith, had yet been subjected. In that plaintive, clinging cry of fatherhood, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!' one hears with what a painful rending of heart the man tore himself loose from the knotted loves and anticipations of a dozen years, to school himself into the expectation of a gift, new, strange, and unheard of—the gift of a miraculous child.

To Sarai also was given a new name for a memorial. Sarah is as slight a modification of her birth-name as Abraham is of Abram. It served a similar purpose. Its lofty meaning—'the princess'—roused in her the same enthusiastic hope, as a stay to faith, which the mention of 'kings' to come of his line had excited in her husband. Like his new name, it kept the great hopes of Jehovah's covenant perpetually in their recollection. The difficulties in the way of Sarah's crediting the recent promise were perhaps hardly so great as in the case of Abraham. For one thing, Ishmael was not her own child, so that in her heart instinctive affection did not plead, as in his, against the birth of a rival. It is true that in her, no less than in him, all hope

of offspring had quite died down; but it could be more easily revived in a childless wife than in the already satisfied father. On the other hand, Sarah's spiritual nature was by no means so deep as her husband's; and perhaps the impossibility of such a birth, which of course was more on her part than on his, might strike her as a woman with even greater force than it had for him. Be this as it may, it was essential that the woman should believe in the promise as well as the man. This free wife cannot be, like the slave-girl, a mere involuntary partner. Her husband's report of the revelation vouchsafed to himself had apparently failed to work conviction in her mind, and a special visit from heaven was therefore granted, on purpose to educate into acquiescence and trustfulness the future mother of the heir.

The first result of the great revelation recorded in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis was the adoption by Abraham of the prescribed rite of circumcision. An Eastern household, however extensive, formed in social estimation, and according to such unwritten law as still regulated primitive rights, a single family, in which every member, servile as well as free, was represented by its chief, and included in his fortunes. In this way, 'the men of his house, born in the house, or bought with money,' were all subjected to the seal of the covenant along with Abraham

himself and his only son.[1] It seems to have been very soon after the religious bond betwixt this household and Jehovah was thus cemented, that there came celestial guests to be entertained 'unawares' by the hospitable sheikh.[2] Not with solemnities of worship did they come, nor in such mysterious loneliness as when God descended to reveal His will to Abraham. This was a more domestic visit. Its chief object bore a family character. It was the first-fruits of a relationship, now fully established, which constituted this man and his family the friends of the Most High. In human and familiar guise, therefore, as wearied wayfarers, did the three draw near. They accepted the homely courtesies of the East, and partook of the refreshments which with their own hands the chief and his wife prepared. It partly belongs to this homely or domestic complexion of the visit, that the visitors did not talk face to face with Sarah, as the angel had talked with Hagar at the fountain. For her chiefly was the interview designed; but, true to the reserve of her sex and rank, the lady remained in her private tent. Through the curtain of dark camel's hair cloth which concealed her, she overheard a conversation intended for her ear, yet, with Oriental reserve, addressed in the first instance to her lord. The

[1] Gen. xvii. 23–27. [2] Gen. xviii. 2; Heb. xiii. 2.

annunciation wrought in her mind the same incredulity as in his. Perhaps it was mingled with a certain pleased astonishment, natural to a woman, in whom such words could not fail to stir the old desire of offspring; for the laugh in which her incredulity betrayed itself was not so deep or secret as that with which her husband had received the news. There is a naïvete about the narrative which carries its own evidence of truthfulness. Through the curtained doorway of the tent, that low laugh was noticed by the disguised representative of the Almighty Promiser, Who, having condescended to become man's friend, will not disdain to mingle in the conversation of men, or to meet their foibles with appropriate remonstrance. 'Wherefore did Sarah laugh? . . . Is anything too hard for Jehovah?' were not words directly spoken to the woman, but they answered her secret mood. They shook her out of her flippant scepticism. They wrought a sudden alternation to shame and fear within her breast. With characteristic impetuosity, forgetting the reserve of social propriety, she answered them aloud. But it was in vain in such a presence to cover unbelief with denial. The next brief and final word was addressed to herself—unseen though she was, behind her curtain, like Adam behind his leaves. It was the first utterance, so far as we know, ever spoken by superhuman lips to

Sarah. It was to be the last. Upon her heart it left a painful reminder of her sin in doubting God's merciful and powerful interposition in her history, as well as of His all-knowledge and almightiness with Whom she had to do: 'Nay; but thou didst laugh.' Who can wonder if Sarah disbelieved no longer?

At length, in the faith of both his parents, there was present the prerequisite condition for Isaac's supernatural conception. His birth was announced to take place at the recurrence of the same season next year. But before it took place, this divine visitation in mercy was to be set in contrast with a divine visitation in judgment. The calm of the patriarchal home was speedily to be invaded with tidings of horror, and the bright hopes which had dawned upon the race of Abraham crossed by a lurid glare, when He who had descended in favour upon Mamre descended in vengeance upon Sodom.

XII.

SODOM AND ITS OVERTHROW.

THIS WAS THE INIQUITY OF THY SISTER SODOM, PRIDE, FULNESS OF BREAD, AND ABUNDANCE OF IDLENESS WAS IN HER AND IN HER DAUGHTERS, NEITHER DID SHE STRENGTHEN THE HAND OF THE POOR AND NEEDY. AND THEY WERE HAUGHTY, AND COMMITTED ABOMINATION BEFORE ME; THEREFORE I TOOK THEM AWAY AS I SAW GOOD.

THE WHOLE LAND THEREOF IS BRIMSTONE, AND SALT, AND BURNING: IT IS NOT SOWN, NOR BEARETH, NOR ANY GRASS GROWETH THEREIN; LIKE THE OVERTHROW OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH, ADMAH AND ZEBOIM, WHICH THE LORD OVERTHREW IN HIS ANGER AND IN HIS WRATH.

TURNING THE CITIES OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH INTO ASHES, HE CONDEMNED THEM WITH AN OVERTHROW, MAKING THEM AN EXAMPLE UNTO THOSE THAT AFTER SHOULD LIVE UNGODLY; AND DELIVERED JUST LOT, VEXED WITH THE FILTHY CONVERSATION OF THE WICKED.

REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE.

HOW SHALL I MAKE THEE AS ADMAH?
HOW SHALL I SET THEE AS ZEBOIM?

XII.

SODOM AND ITS OVERTHROW.

NO other event in early history has left such deep traces upon the language and traditions of the world as the catastrophe which in Abraham's days overthrew the towns of the Lower Jordan. In some twenty passages scattered over Scripture from the Pentateuch to the Apocalypse, this is referred to by name[1] as the most conspicuous instance of divine vengeance upon sin. The very word used by the Hebrews to describe it, which our version renders 'overthrow,' and which St. Peter translates by 'catastrophe,' is almost reserved for this special use;[2] and what is still more curious, its equivalent is said to recur in the same sense in the Arabic Koran, till it becomes quite a proper term for the unfortunate cities. Sodom's very

[1] 'By name;' besides other places in which (as some suppose) it supplies imagery to the sacred writer, as, for example, in Ps. xi. 6.

[2] The Hebrew word for it is מַהְפֵּכָה, and the Greek *καταστροφή*, 2 Pet. ii. 6. Both denote the entire reversal of previous conditions, like the French *bouleversement*.

name is 'the Overthrown.'[1] Nor is it Oriental peoples only who have gazed with horror on this 'example' of vengeance.[2] The Roman Tacitus describes the region of perpetual burning in language similar to that of the Jew Josephus, or the Christian St. Peter.[3] Neither the suddenness of that destruction, nor its completeness, nor even the miraculous incidents which attended it, might have availed to preserve through so many centuries the impression which it made upon the primitive world, had not its visible effects (the *vestigia* of the Latin historian) remained from that day to this, as a witness to successive generations how the wickedness of man had once worn out the long-suffering of God.

An event so memorable, which is also closely bound up with the history of Abraham, deserves a study to itself, before we pass on to later events in the patriarch's life.

It will be remembered that when Abraham and his nephew entered Canaan, the 'circle'[4] of the Lower Jordan was in a high state of cultivation. It is spoken of as a perfect paradise,

[1] See Dr. Taylor Lewis' excellent note to the American translation of Lange's *Bibelwerk*, vol. i. pp. 443, 444.

[2] Jude, ver. 7.

[3] The language of Tacitus (v. 7) is: 'Campi quos ferunt olim uberes, magnisque urbibus habitatos fulminum jactu arsisse et manere vestigia terramque ipsam specie torridam vim frugiferam perdidisse; nam cuncta atra et inania velut in cinerem vanescunt.'

[4] Mistranslated 'plain' in our authorized version.

similar in fertility and in the mode of its irrigation to the land of Egypt.[1] From the commencement of our era, it has been usual to assign this once favoured region to the south of the Dead Sea, or to suppose that it must lie submerged beneath its southern waters. I am inclined to agree with the most careful recent explorers,[2] who find its site at the northern or upper end, where the lake receives the inflow of the Jordan. The upper portion of the Dead Sea is found to be excessively deep, and the whole conformation of the great 'Ghor' or depression in which it lies has satisfied geographers that there must have been a sheet of water there ever since history began. Just before the river at present enters the lake, the valley expands to its greatest width. The hills curve back to enclose a veritable 'round' or 'circle' of flat land, answering the description of Genesis, and sufficiently ample—being ten or twelve miles across[3]—to have embraced four or five neighbour 'cities,' such as cities were at

[1] Gen. xiii. 10: 'As the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.'

[2] So Mr. Geo. Grove (Smith's *Dictionary*, art. 'Sodom'), Dean Stanley (*Sin. and Pal.*), and Canon Tristram (who discusses the subject in *Land of Israel*, pp. 354–358, and again in *Land of Moab*, pp. 330–334). If the last-named writer's proposed identification of Zoar with the Zi'ara which he has discovered (see *Land of Moab*, *l.c.*) should be sustained by further inquiry, this will decide the point. It appears to agree well with the language of Deut. xxxiv. 3. Quite lately, however, a fresh site has been suggested by the Rev. Selah Merrill, of the American Exploration Fund.

[3] This is the breadth given by Robinson in his *Physical Geography*

that early date. The entire plain no doubt possessed originally the same fertility which afterwards made the adjacent Jericho one of the loveliest and richest spots in Syria. Fed by the Jordan and the springs which send down streams to it from the sheltering hills, a copious supply of water could easily be led by artificial conduits to any part of the district; and the almost tropical heat of that deep depression must have forced, then as now, a luxuriance and variety of vegetation which are to be found nowhere else on the same parallel of latitude.

Clustered close together in this flat plain, probably on the eastern side of the river, and nestling among palm trees and groves of balsam, in a climate always mild and often sultry, there rose a group of four or five little towns. Of these, Sodom must have been by far the largest, for it always heads the list or stands as the representative of the group. Her little sisters were named Gomorrah or 'Amorah, Admah, Tseboim, and (least of all) Bela. These towns had been erected by the race which already we have found to be in early history the chief builders of the world. To the race of Ham were due the huge towers of Babylon, the colossal temples of Egypt, and the capacious

of the Holy Land, p. 72. On the true meaning of the Hebrew word rendered 'plain' in the V. see Stanley's *Sin. and Pal.* pp. 284, note, and 488.

harbours of Tyre. Compared with such famous seats of Hamitic power, Sodom was probably an unimportant settlement; yet Sodom was already a walled town.[1] It is important to bear in mind its ethnological affinity with those states which figure in subsequent history as the chief oppressors of Israel; because this gave point to the warning which its fate was made to sound in the ears of these luxurious empires through many an age. Sodom is employed as a type of Babylon's fall by two of the greatest prophets.[2] It is conjoined with Tyre and Sidon in the solemn warnings of our Lord Himself.[3] And in the Book of Revelation it stands side by side with Egypt as a type of exceptional impiety.[4] Those characteristics of the Hamitic races, which again and again proved their overthrow, come out strikingly in the men of Sodom and her sister towns. Early addicted to the arts of peace, they were agriculturists and merchants as well as builders. They chose their settlements where rich soil was to be had close beside some main avenue of traffic—at a harbour like Tyre, or on the estuary of a great river like the Nile or the Euphrates. Sodom itself stood not only in the alluvium of a river bed, but on a main highway for land carriage between Babylon

[1] Gen. xix. 1: 'The *gate* of Sodom.'
[2] Isaiah (xiii. 19) and Jeremiah (l. 40).
[3] Matt. xi. 20–24. [4] Rev. xi. 8.

and Egypt. The natural consequences of such a position followed fast. What Ezekiel in his analysis of its decline calls 'fulness of bread,' comes without toil to a population so favourably situated.[1] Wealth flowed in. With wealth easily acquired came 'abundance of idleness;' and with leisure and wealth came luxury, their daughter. Then followed pride, the insolence of the pampered; at last, self-indulgence and shameless licence. Possibly the time had not yet arrived for the cultivation of those adornments which lend dignity to wealth, and serve even to veil the deformity of dissolute manners; of letters, I mean, and of the arts. Possibly the race was not endowed by nature with such gifts. At any rate, we detect no signs of such a degree of culture or refinement as has always accompanied civilisation among Aryan peoples. The early civilisation of the Hamitic tribes seems to have been of a vulgar material type, and to have fallen a speedy prey to vice and corruption. How far that corruption had gone in the case of Sodom is only too apparent on the face of the narrative. Disgusting and unnatural lust has been the plague-spot of heathenism in other times, as well as of at least one Moslem race in our own. But it never carried itself with such

[1] Ezek. xvi. 49–50 is the most exact account of the progress of corruption in these towns which Scripture affords; and it agrees in the main with that given by Josephus in the *Antiq.* i. 11. Compare also Isa. iii. 9 and Jer. xxiii. 14.

effrontery, or showed its vileness so openly, as in the town which has given it a name.[1] Wherever it has appeared, it has marked a stage of social degradation ripe for destruction. Four hundred years after Sodom, other Canaanite tribes in Palestine had become infected with it, till the land was ready, in the strong words of Leviticus, to 'spue them out.'[2] Its prevalence in Greece when St. Paul wrote his letter to the Church of Rome showed how near Greece was to its fall.[3] What it means in the case of the Turk, we are seeing to-day with our eyes. Unnatural vice fills the cup of iniquity to overflowing. It sends up a 'cry' to heaven that the righteous Judge must answer.

Premonitory symptoms had not been wanting to show that the strength of these five towns was already undermined. Their political vassalage to Chedorlaomer, and their inability to avert his chastisement of their revolt, were significant of decline. The brilliant rescue by Abraham had procured them a brief respite, but it led to no amendment in morals; and now it pleased Heaven to inflict the overthrow which had become inevitable, not by the sword of any conqueror, but by natural agencies which men would recognise as more immediately in the

[1] 'Sodomite' occurs in this opprobrious sense in Deut. xxiii. 17, as well as repeatedly in the First and Second Book of Kings.

[2] See Lev. xix. 22–30 and xx. 22. [3] Rom. i. 26, 27.

hand of God. That commonwealths should fall through foreign assault or internal decay, when their ancient virtues have once yielded to the enervating influence of luxury, is a commonplace of history written in ruins across the face of many a land; but the world has usually been slow to read in such events any moral judgment from God. That the destructive forces of nature should here and there work havoc on a great scale, desolating a province, or laying a town in ashes, is a fact of no less frequent occurrence; only in such accidents men have usually no right to read any sentence of Heaven against the wickedness of the sufferers. The peculiarity of Sodom lay in this, that a state already ripe for overthrow, and doomed to it, fell through a calamity which could not be called accidental, because its connection with the sin of the people was too clearly pointed out by the voice of God. Sin ripe for judgment coincided with a sudden disaster wrought by natural forces. No one was able either to miss or to question the moral tie which bound the disaster to the sin as its express penalty. It has not very often happened so in the divine government of our race. It could not happen very often without destroying the value of our present probation. If men witnessed every Sodom swept from the earth's bosom by the stroke of angry Heaven, so soon as its crimes became ready for judgment, the

character of virtue itself might be changed. It might degenerate into a prudent calculation of the moment when impunity could no longer be counted on. Yet, while not occurring too often, one can see good cause why such a lesson should at one time or other have been given to the world. Men needed to have it made visible—writ large in indelible and decipherable characters, even on the earth's surface—that there is a moral Governor Who takes cognizance of evil, to Whose ear the cry for vengeance goes up when deeds are done that outrage humanity, and within Whose hand lies every agency which can either make or blast the fortunes of a commonwealth.

I cannot doubt that there was a special need at that very period for some such lesson, though at this distance of time we may be unable to recover it. A sufficient interval had elapsed since the flood, which had been the last great warning, to permit of an alarming advance in open, defiant, and impious profligacy. If Sodom's cup was full, that of its neighbours was filling fast. Other branches of the human family were hurrying along the same path. It was mercy to erect, right in the centre of the populous lands, on the very road by which men passed from north to south and east to west, a monument of Heaven's justice. It was specially merciful to the other Canaanitish tribes to have

such a spectacle laid at their own door. It is true that the spectacle, if it postponed, did not hinder their reaching a similar excess of immorality some centuries later. For the sword of Joshua was ultimately sent to execute on them the doom which Heaven's fire had executed on their neighbours in the Jordan plain. Still, God's warnings are mercifully meant, even where they are not taken; and terrible as this Sodom catastrophe was, it belongs to that class of terrors in which a wise man will trace 'the loving-kindness of the Lord.'[1] Even the mission of the angels to the wicked town ought probably to be taken as a final chance of reformation extended to it. There is something quite child-like and primitive in the anthropomorphic form into which the narrative is cast: 'I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it which is come unto Me, and if not, I will know.'[2] Men thought very humanly of the Deity when God needed to speak thus in accommodation to their simple conceptions. Still, I see no occasion to doubt that, under this divine visit of inspection, there lay a merciful purpose to spare or to delay, should the men of Sodom, even under this closing test, discover (like the men of

[1] See Ps. cvii. *passim;* especially the key to its lesson in verse 43.

[2] These words suggest a parallel expression in Ezek. xvi. 50, which ought to be read thus: 'I took them away *as I saw;' i.e.* in accordance with what I witnessed when I visited them to see what they did.

Nineveh) a better mind. It was their conduct during that night which cut, though they knew it not, the worn thread of patience, and precipitated the horrors of the morning.

The two strangers who entered the gate of Sodom on the evening before its fall had dined with Abraham that day upon the heights of Mamre. The mission of these celestial visitors had for its first object, as we have seen, the annunciation of glad tidings to Abraham's wife; its second was to visit Sodom with judgment. So impartially do Heaven's messengers execute alike its mercy and its severity. So closely in our world's fortunes are the white threads and the black intertwisted.

On the errand of grace, however, there was a third messenger, loftier than the other two, and more nearly identified with the Sender, whom we miss from the execution of vengeance. The same ambiguity which was already noticed in connection with 'the angel of the Lord,' hangs in still darker folds over this third visitor. At the opening of the interview he is included with his companions under the simple phrase which describes their apparent, certainly not their secret, condition: 'Three men stood by him.' When the conversation proceeds, one of the three comes to the front as sole spokesman. By and by he is denominated without reserve

Jehovah, 'the Lord.' Finally, he permits the others to go forward, while he alone remains with Abraham; and thenceforward the colloquy takes the form of an immediate converse of the patriarch with God Himself. The disputed name, 'the angel of the Lord,' does not occur in connection with this mysterious personage. And though the difficulties are great in the way of assuming here an actual theophany in human disguise, yet it must be owned that any construction of the text which avoids such an assumption seems to put a strain upon its natural sense. For all practical intents at least, the Interlocutor throughout the interview with Abraham must have been taken by him, and may be taken by us, as equivalent to the Divine Being Himself.

This being so, it is natural to imagine that some reason deeper than mere convenience underlay his absence from his comrades during the second half of their joint errand. Vengeance is described as God's 'strange work.'[1] Even at the final judgment of the world, it is His angels whom our Lord represents Himself as sending forth to gather out of His kingdom all that do iniquity.[2] It comports, one might say, with the dignity, no less than with the pleasure, of the sovereign Judge to delegate to meaner hands

[1] Isa. xxviii. 21. Compare Lam. iii. 33.
[2] Matt. xiii. 41.

the execution of His justice. But if it be fair thus to read between the lines, it must be conceded that the absence of the mysterious leader of the party later in the day was quite naturally brought about. It arose from his tarrying behind to confer with Abraham. The sheikh had courteously escorted his guests on their walk across the hills in the direction of the Ghor of Jordan. A tradition, as old as the days of Jerome, says, with great probability, that he accompanied them to a spot which can still be fairly identified, whence is obtained a wide view to the eastward, and through the descending ravines the eye can penetrate almost to the bottom of the valley.[1] Here, it is allowable to suppose, he paused; and here, while the inferior two held on their way, the Third Visitor paused also.

The motives which induced the communication of the divine purpose to Abraham are hinted at in the text of Genesis, and are in themselves readily intelligible. For one thing, God had been pleased to enter into terms of friendship with this man; should not the secret of the Lord be with one who fears Him?[2] A very ancient gloss upon the words of soliloquy by which the narrator expresses the divine in-

[1] See Jerome (*Ep.* 86) for the tradition regarding Caphar Barucha; and for the presumed identification with Beni Na'im, consult Robinson, *Bibl. Researches*, i. 491.

[2] Ps. xxv. 14.

tention and its reasons[1] points to this explanation. The Septuagint version reads them thus: 'Shall I hide from Abraham My friend that thing which I do?' This insertion of the words 'My friend' has excellently caught the force of the question. It was because Abraham had been restored by covenant to a footing of friendly favour with God that there was no longer any ground for secrecy. On the contrary, recovered trust, affection, and submission to God are precisely the conditions which qualify a man for entering with intelligent sympathy into the secrets of the divine procedure.[2] Besides, Abraham was the prophet of his age. He stood between God and his contemporaries, as, in a certain sense, the vehicle to them of Heaven's mind and its interpreter. If the awful significance of the approaching catastrophe was to become widely understood with any certainty, it was fitting that the voice of God should first discover its inner causes to the one ear which was open to that voice. Above all, the punishment of Sodom was an event which directly concerned Abraham. It was destined to carry a lesson, both for himself and for his remote posterity.

For himself, in the first instance, as a man

[1] Gen. xviii. 17. The Septuagint reading is as old at least as Philo. See *Speaker's Commentary, in loc.*

[2] Compare our Lord's words in Matt. xi. 25-27.

who had been led to covenant with God, the fate of the towns was charged with one lesson at least of the highest consequence. No inference could be deduced from the exceptional honour God had lately conferred on this man, which was so insidious or likely to prove so fatal in its bearing on spiritual life, as the imagination that God, when He has bound Himself to be gracious, is not altogether a God of justice, but may be expected to wink at the faults of those whom He has selected for His friends. It is true that no trace of this dangerous abuse of grace had up to this time appeared in Abraham. That it never appeared at all may have been partly due to the solemn lesson he was now to receive respecting the impartial righteousness and moral severity of Jehovah. But if the Hebrew founder was far from reckoning on the favouritism of Heaven, his posterity in many an after age caught the infection. How often did they present the shocking spectacle of a people who live in defiant wrong and uncleanness, yet shelter themselves under the cry: 'The temple of the Lord are we!'[1] Surely it could not be without significance, that at the very moment when Jehovah had elevated Abraham and his race into a place of unexampled intimacy, nearness, and favour, He should have shown

[1] Compare Jer. vii. 4 ff. Remonstrance against such an abuse of their national privileges is a frequent 'burden' with the prophets.

Himself, by a startling interposition, to be not less really the God of all other men as well, and a God Who rules the earth in righteousness tempered with forbearing mercy. That Jehovah is the God of all the tribes of men, and not of one elect family only; that He is the Judge of the whole earth, Who must do right; that He interferes in human affairs to punish sin as well as to confer favours; that therefore His mercy to Abraham's seed must repose on righteousness as its base, and be forfeited by persistent impiety or injustice;—all this was teaching peculiarly in season at an hour like that. And some such teaching seems indicated in the words: 'I have known Abraham,' that is, I have chosen and called him to My grace, 'in order that he might instruct his posterity to keep the way of the Lord,' the true religion of Jehovah, 'and to do justice and judgment; that so (by their upright and religious conduct) the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.'[1] The covenant of God with the seed of Abraham was not a covenant which rewarded the merit of their good deeds. As little, on the other hand, was it a grace which took no account of the people's moral or religious state at all. It was a promise only for that true seed of Abraham which walked in the steps of their father, by

[1] For this corrected sense of the text in Gen. xviii. 19, which our version has missed, see the later commentators.

'keeping the way of Jehovah,' and 'doing justice and judgment' before Him. When nominal Israel came to walk in the ways of Sodom, its own prophets were not slow to denounce upon it the doom of Sodom.[1]

In the light of what has just been said, I think it is instructive to notice that the key-note of Abraham's wonderful prayer for the five towns is not mercy, but justice. It is, in truth, hardly an intercession, so much as an expostulation. The speaker seems quite to realize that the time was over for forbearance and the pity that spares; the time for inquisition, and the judicial reckoning which follows it, had come. No doubt, in that mixture of noble motives out of which alone he could draw such courage to plead, one powerful element must have been a humane compassion for the fate of his neighbours and countrymen, as well as a kinsman's special love for the endangered family of Lot. But his words betray a deeper feeling. Beneath these considerations, there lay a godly concern that the divine name, dishonoured by the idolatrous tribes around, should display itself as undeniably just even in retribution. At any rate, the basis of his pleading was simply this, that possibly the moral foulness of these towns,

[1] This threatening, based on a comparison of the Jewish vices with those of the ancient cities, recurs again and again; see Isa. i. 9, 10; Jer. xxiii. 14; Lam. iv. 6; Ezek. xvi. 46-53; Amos iv. 11.

though widespread enough, might not prove to be quite universal; and that, if only a small minority of the population had kept itself clean, it was inconsistent with the impartiality of God to confound good with bad in one indiscriminate act of punishment. Even this argument he ventures to urge only with such expressions of profound reverence and diffidence as become a mortal who dares to reason with his Maker. Throughout the interview, the humility of Abraham is quite as remarkable as his courage. He is but 'dust and ashes.' Once and again, as he presses his plea a step farther after each concession gained, does he deprecate the divine displeasure against such perseverance. With all this humility, however, there is no hesitation whatever about the terms in which the argument itself is stated. It may be presumptuous in a man to remonstrate with his Judge at all; but there can be no presumption in counting upon the rectitude of the Judge. Without misgiving, therefore, does this simple-hearted man address God in these terms: 'That be far from Thee to act after this manner—to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked—that be far from Thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' Such shadows from the inequalities of earthly providence, as at a later age fell deep upon the speculative intellect of Job, had not yet fallen

on the childlike soul of Abraham. Out of the clear depths of his own conscience he looked up, and in the clear depth of heaven saw a moral nature enthroned over men, at least as upright, fair, and true as his own. Nor did he err in this. It is a wonderful confirmation of man's right to reason from the most certain intuitions of his own moral being to the character and ways of Him Who made man, that Jehovah neither resented nor disappointed the appeal of His servant. To each successive question He returned a calm assent: 'I will not do it for the sake of so many.' As far as the courage or the justice of the man made bold to go, God's higher and more merciful justice went along with him. More merciful it is; for when at last the man stopped short at ten, God did not stop short. He saved at the last no more than four persons out of four cities;—four only, of whom but one, perhaps, could in fairness be called 'a righteous person.' His righteousness is like the great mountains, even when His judgments are a great deep![1]

I cannot turn away from this amazing colloquy—the first in which a fallen man, restored to friendship with his God, ventured to put to the proof his new privilege of child-like approach and free speech—without calling attention to the light it shed so early in history

[1] Ps. xxxvi. 6.

upon the secret principles which regulate the action of God in human affairs. 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the city for their sakes,' is a key to unlock many problems of Providence. It turns on the very same mixture of good and bad in all earthly societies, of which our blessed Lord made use in His parable of the tares.[1] The bad are tolerated because the good must not be destroyed; and so long as this inextricable combination lasts, the presence of the bad is made a useful discipline for the good, the presence of the good a means of grace to the bad. How often may the impatient angels have said: 'Wilt Thou that we go and gather them up?' Always the answer of the righteous Lord has been: 'Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together *until the harvest!*' The harvest of Sodom was already ripe.

Much of the interest of the later scenes in this drama turns upon the turbid character of Lot; and it is a very painful interest. Lot has long served for an example of a man, good at bottom, who is spoilt, and well-nigh ruined, through his culpable intercourse with the ungodly. Originally, no doubt, he was of feebler character than his uncle, and was drawn along

[1] Matt. xiii. 24–30, 37–43.

chiefly by his noble example. It betrayed a curious, though by no means an unusual, blindness to his own infirmity, when on a fatal day Lot chose to settle alone in the valley of the Jordan. He threw away in doing so his best safeguard. But such a choice was worse than a blunder. To one who had crossed the desert avowedly in search not of better grazing-grounds, but of a place in which to worship the true God without molestation, the attractions of the Lower Jordan could be nothing but a temptation. Of course his original intention was to remain a nomadic sheep-master, and keep aloof from the lewd idolaters of the towns. But the moth cannot flutter about the flame with impunity. At first the tent of Lot was only pitched near the gate of Sodom. By and by he abandoned tent-life altogether, and inhabited a house in the city. At last he married or betrothed[1] his girls to native Sodomites, and sat in its gateway as one of its conspicuous citizens at a time when the cry of its pollutions had gone up to heaven. Neither his capture by the army of Chedorlaomer, nor his unlooked-for deliverance by his uncle, broke the fascination which held him in Sodom. At least, the family and social ties by which he twisted himself into its fortunes were

[1] 'Betrothed,' for Gen. xix. 8 shows that (as Josephus saw) ver. 14 should be read, 'which were about to marry.' From ver. 12, however, it is probable that he had another daughter already married in the town, who perished with her husband.

too strong to be broken by these events. His whole behaviour on that eventful night revealed how far the evil communications had corrupted his good manners. One virtue, indeed, survived. He showed himself no less hospitable than his uncle. In defence of the sacred rights of a guest, he even risked his own life; the one flash of manly spirit which redeems in any measure the story of that night. But hospitality, like other virtues which depend on social conditions, can often survive a general decay of morals; and in his very hospitality Lot betrayed how the air of Sodom had blunted his sense of personal purity. To shield his guests, he offered to sacrifice not merely his own life, but the virtue of his virgin daughters. It must have been hard indeed to retain in such a spot any high standard of morals. Perhaps it is safe to infer, that a father who had consented to give his daughters to such husbands could scarcely be very nice about their honour.

His religion had suffered no less from the bad neighbourhood than his virtue. It is at this point that Lot contrasts most unfavourably with his uncle. He retained a religious man's instincts of trust and of obedience to God, yet in a very decayed and unhealthy condition. He believed the angels when they foretold the destruction of the town. But in his faith was such a distressing mixture of cowardly irresolu-

tion as had well-nigh undone them all. Because his intended sons-in-law jeered at the alarm, Lot's faith wavered. When dawn appeared, he would have stayed still where he was, had not the messengers of Heaven, with a kindly violence, urged his retreat. Once clear of the doomed town, he gave way afresh to helpless and unmanly fright. The hills seemed too far off and too insecure to be a refuge. He could not suppose himself safe except within town walls, even though the town were but 'a little one.' Before long, even Bela or Zoar appeared no longer secure enough to shelter him.[1] As if it lay too near that scene of horror, which one would imagine had utterly unnerved the man and robbed him of all confidence in God, the wretched old man betook himself like a hermit to a cavern in the mountain's side.

To such a pitiable state of moral impotence had an unfaithful life led this servant of Jehovah. For the edge of the moral which his example points lies in this, that to the last he continued to be a servant of Jehovah. He was not seduced by evil surroundings either into idolatry or into

[1] Kurz, in his *Geschichte d. Alten Bundes*, i. 195, has noted it as characteristic of a feeble character, that after living in Sodom so long with no apprehension of danger, Lot should pass to the opposite extreme, and not feel safe even in Zoar. Surely his character cannot always have been so feeble. It needed a certain resolution to leave Haran with his adventurous uncle. Niemeyer, in his *Characteristiken*, lays stress on what he terms Lot's *Trägheit*, his cold and sluggish disposition.

profligacy. The filthy deeds of his neighbours 'vexed his righteous soul.' He must even have exasperated them by occasional, perhaps by habitual, remonstrances; else they could scarcely have cast it up to him at the last, that having come in as a foreigner, he had set himself up to be their judge.[1] In spite of his faults, an apostle could still call him a 'just' man; the 'godly' one whom the Lord 'knew how to deliver.' His very deliverance from a ruin so sweeping proved the exceptional pureness of his life. It is precisely this which makes his case so instructive. What warning can be more appalling against every unhallowed association which pious people can contract with ungodly comrades? What example could better illustrate the dangers which beset the path of those who '*will* be rich'?[2] Literally, he was 'saved as by fire;' 'a firebrand,' as Amos described him, 'plucked out of the burning;' reminding us of Paul's vivid picture of the man who, while he builds on the true foundation, yet spends his days in erecting an inflammable edifice with hay and stubble.[3] In the conflagration of that morning, there perished his property, home, wife, sons—everything save two ill-taught girls, who seemed spared only to become the infamy of his dis-

[1] Gen. xix. 9. Tuch thinks the expression in this verse, rendered 'will needs be a judge' in our version, implies a *habit* of interference on the part of Lot. Compare the words of Peter, 2 Pet. ii. 7–9.

[2] 1 Tim. vi. 9. [3] See Amos iv. 11 and 1 Cor. iii. 12–15.

honoured and lonely old age. Saved, indeed, yet so as by fire.

Over the last scene of his life it is decent to draw a veil. For his drunkenness on two successive evenings, at least, Lot was responsible, if not for the incest to which it led. And the fact gives a painful insight into his moral state, even after experience which might have sobered any man. The conduct of his children out of Sodom is of a piece with what we know of their upbringing in Sodom. It is fair, indeed, to remember, that in that age, as the case of Abraham himself shows, the law of incest was not yet firmly defined; and the exceptional circumstances of their situation must count for something.[1] Still, the circumstance that they despaired of winning their father's consent when he was sober, is enough to show that they themselves felt their purpose to be, in spite of all excuses, an extremely doubtful one. Israel's descent from the child of sacred promise and of obedient faith is made the more bright by contrast with the dismal origin of Israel's kindred, the sons of Moab and of Ben-Ammi.

The rescue of Lot occupied the brief interval between the earliest dawn and the rising of

[1] The motives to this crime are well given in Niemeyer, ii. p. 127, and in Kurz, i. 196. Josephus understood their notion to be that 'all mankind was destroyed.' But this is improbable.

the sun. The moment of sunrise was the moment of judgment on the condemned towns. Speculation has long busied itself to explain by what means this catastrophe was brought about, and what geological changes it wrought on the locality which was its scene. The tendency of modern inquiry leans to the conclusion that it was unattended by any great convulsion of nature, that the features of the district were not materially altered, and that the agencies employed were such simple ones as lay to hand. For one thing, the old idea of a submergence of the whole tract beneath the lake may now be given up.[1] All the evidence points to fire only, and not water, as the instrument of destruction. Nor is it by any means certain that either an earthquake or a volcanic eruption from the soil accompanied or occasioned that morning's work of ruin. It would have been nothing singular, indeed, if it had done so. It is very well known how full the whole of the Jordan valley is of traces of igneous action.[2] Its frequent hot sulphurous springs, which have long been celebrated, its dykes of basalt, its tolerably defined craters, tell the same story as the earthquakes which have again and again shaken

[1] Reland (*Palestina*, p. 254) seems to have been the first to question this traditional theory.

[2] For fuller details of all these indications of volcanic activity in the district, consult Ritter, *Comp. Geogr.* ii. 241 ff. (Gage's trans.).

it within historical memory; in Uzziah's reign,[1] for example, as well as more recently in 1759, and again in 1837. But the neighbourhood offers to this day one very conspicuous feature, which may well explain the catastrophe of Sodom, without calling for any convulsion of the earth at all. Its soil retains traces of a highly bituminous character. Pure bitumen or asphalt has for a long time been disengaged at intervals from the deep bottom of the Dead Sea, rising to its surface in considerable masses. It did so as recently as the years 1834 and 1837. There must therefore be an extensive formation of this inflammable mineral at a great depth below the lake's shores. On these shores themselves, although sulphur, saltpetre, and other minerals are found, bitumen is not now to be discovered. But we have it on the authority of Genesis,[2] that it did abound there previous to the burning of the towns. When the townsmen sallied forth to give battle to Chedorlaomer's army, they chose to fight in the vale of Siddim, because it was full of 'slime-pits;' that is, of wells of bitumen, such as are found in other localities. The soil, therefore, yielded abundantly at that time a substance which now rises only from the bed of the lake. With this pitch from their pitch-

[1] That visitation became a date to reckon by—see Amos i. 1; and it lingered long in popular recollection, Zech. xiv. 5.

[2] Gen. xiv. 10.

wells the natives no doubt cemented their bricks, as the cognate population at Babylon is known to have done.[1] Perhaps they also paved their streets with it, as is usual to-day with the side-walks in Paris. It is plain that towns built in this fashion and on such a soil formed a perfect magazine of the most inflammable materials. They only required to be set thoroughly on fire, in order to become, in a single hour or so, one huge furnace, in which everything combustible must perish.[2] It is most probable that this is precisely what occurred. That 'the Lord rained brimstone and fire out of heaven,' is the brief account of it which Scripture affords.[3] Josephus speaks of a thunderbolt; Tacitus, of a stroke of lightning. A modern scholar has suggested a thunder-storm accompanied with meteoric stones.[4]

[1] Ritter (iii. 151) refers to the similarity of the soil at the north end of the Dead Sea to that of Babylon in its fitness for making brick and obtaining cement (called 'slime' in our version of Gen. xi. 3). See also Robinson, *Bibl. Res.* ii. 188: 'In the same plain were slime-pits, that is to say, wells of bitumen or asphaltum; the Hebrew word being the same as that used in describing the building of the walls of Babylon, which we know were cemented with bitumen.' The word Shinar occurs in both localities—perhaps the archaic name for the Babylonian plain, brought from the East.

[2] Von Schubert (cited in Ritter, iv. 84) thought the district looked as if it had been burned by the kindling of exudations from the soil, not by volcanic fire.

[3] Our Lord, in Luke xvii. 29, adheres literally to the words used in the original record of Gen. xix. 24.

[4] This is the conjecture of Mr. George Grove, in Smith's *Dictionary*, art. 'Sodom.'

Whatever be the exact scientific rendering of the popular language employed in the Bible, it is easy to see that it only needed such a visitation from Heaven as would by any method set on fire the buildings with the adjacent pitch-fountains and the soil itself, saturated as that was with bitumen, to originate a blaze from whose sudden heat and flame not one of the slumbering inhabitants could escape, and the smoke of which might well be going up to the sky in a dense, black, and threatening column, when, an hour or two later, Abraham climbed to the same outlook on the hills to the west, where the day before he had stood in prayer before the Lord. Probably nothing that ever happened on the earth before or since approached so near to those appalling images of the infernal regions, given in later Scripture, which brooded over the imagination of mediæval Christendom, till they left broad stains of horror over all mediæval art and poetry. It is even possible that such images of the final punishment reserved for the wicked may originally have been suggested by that unparalleled conflagration itself. Not only did whole cities perish utterly, leaving no trace; but the very plain itself on which they stood, after being turned for the time into a field of burning, was reduced to perpetual sterility. This subsequent barrenness, in what had been most fruitful land,

suggests some volcanic change at the period of the overthrow more distinctly than any other circumstance. For what has spoilt the fertility of the soil is this, that when its bitumen was burnt away, fossil salt seems to have taken its place. Fossil salt is a product of volcanic action, operating along a great crevasse like the Ghor of Jordan.[1] Of this salt formation we seem to have a hint in the fate of Lot's wife.[2] The whole shores of the Dead Sea at the present day, from the one end of it to the other, are covered with evidences of its extent. The waters of the lake are impregnated with it to one-fourth of their own weight, and owe to it their peculiar briny bitterness. At the southern end, as at Usdum, for example, it is well known that the bed of salt is exposed to such a thickness, that it splits into solid columns of fantastic shape. At the north end, you may ride for a couple of hours from the lake before you reach the present oasis of Jericho; and all the way your horse's hoofs will sink through a salt crust into a friable mould some inches deep, in which nothing will grow. The soil is devoid of all but the scantiest vegetation. The place is waste and barren. This has been that enduring

[1] So says Von Buch, the geologist, in a letter to Dr. Robinson, printed in the latter's *Bibl. Resear.* ii. 191; an important contribution to this subject, which the student should consult.

[2] Gen. xix. 26.

'vengeance' to which St. Jude bears witness.[1] To this hour the spot may be described exactly as it is described in the Book of Deuteronomy: 'The whole land is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein;'[2] exactly as the prophet Zephaniah described it in his day: 'The breeding-place of nettles, and salt pits, and a perpetual desolation;'[3] or as an apocryphal writer described it in times still later: 'The waste land that smoketh, plants bearing fruit that never comes to ripeness, where a standing pillar of salt is the monument of an unbelieving soul.'[4]

For its awful suddenness, then, for its thoroughness, and for its perpetual tokens, this ancient overthrow stands forth in history as the appointed type of all divine acts of judgment; and chiefly of that last act to which we now look forward, and for which it is every man's wisdom to prepare himself. This dreadful office it continued to fill down to the close of revelation. For the smoke of Sodom flings its shadow even across the predictions of our Lord,[5] to heighten the impressiveness of that picture which the Judge Himself in His mercy sketched beforehand of His day of inquisition and of wrath.

[1] Jude 7. [2] Deut. xxix. 23. [3] Zeph. ii. 9. [4] Wisd. x. 7.
[5] Luke xvii. 28–33. Compare 2 Thess. i. 7–9; 2 Pet. iii. 7–12.

'As it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.'

'Remember Lot's wife.'

'Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.'

XIII.

AT GERAR AND BEERSHEBA.

CANAAN, THE LAND OF THE PHILISTINES.

THE NAME OF THE CITY IS BEERSHEBA UNTO THIS DAY.

AS THEN, HE THAT WAS BORN AFTER THE FLESH PERSECUTED HIM THAT WAS BORN AFTER THE SPIRIT, EVEN SO IT IS NOW.

THE SERVANT ABIDETH NOT IN THE HOUSE FOR EVER, BUT THE SON ABIDETH EVER.

XIII.

AT GERAR AND BEERSHEBA.

THE year which elapsed between the annunciation and the birth of Isaac was not spent by Abraham, as one might have expected, in unbroken stillness at his usual camp among the oaks of Mamre. Whether it was the impression of horror left upon his mind by the awful overthrow of the four towns, in whose fate he probably imagined the entire family of his relatives to be engulfed, which made the neighbourhood displeasing to him, can only be a matter of conjecture. No reason is assigned by the sacred historian for so sudden a removal. What is certain is, that he did soon after break up the settlement near Hebron which for fifteen years had been his home. He moved farther to the south-west and nearer to the desert. After halting at various points in the 'Negeb' or South-land of Canaan,[1] he finally attempted a

[1] 'Negeb' is the word used in Gen. xx. 1, and is quite a standing local term.

more permanent encampment close to the head-quarters of a stranger tribe. Gerar (as the place was named) remains to this day an undiscovered site. At that time it formed the capital of a Philistine people allied to the Egyptians,[1] whose five subdivisions at a later period occupied the Shephelah, or strip of level land along the southern coasts, whence they waged with Israel an incessant border warfare. To that coast-strip they lent their own name of Philistia or Palestine, which in much later times came to be inaccurately extended to the whole land.[2] The name implies that they had entered the country as immigrants, expelling or absorbing an earlier nomadic race of Avim.[3] At first the conquerors were themselves nomads; but the pastoral life which they retained in Abraham's age, and which led them to affect the frontier pastures of the South-land, had been exchanged before Joshua's invasion for settled habits, a common polity, a league of coast towns, and considerable advancement in military, commercial, and industrial pursuits. As yet they were a simple clan of shepherds, few in number, and far from formidable; most unlike their warlike descendants, who broke the

[1] See Gen. x. 13, 14. The steps of this tribal derivation are still subject to dispute among ethnologists.

[2] The use of Palestine in its wider sense is not biblical. It arose from the Greeks, who at first knew only the coast-plain.

[3] Deut. ii. 23. 'Hazerim' simply means 'moveable villages.'

power of Israel in the disastrous fight at Aphek, and crushed the house of Saul on the fatal field of Gilboa.[1] The official title borne by their successive chieftains was Abi-melek. At least its meaning, when rendered into Semitic speech, was expressed by these words.[2] Like the Padi-shah of the Persians, the name signifies 'My father the king,'—fit title for a pastoral sheikh, who wielded over his clansmen a kindly although irresponsible authority. Abraham's visit to the territory of this petty 'king' led to the formation of friendly ties, which lasted at least through his son's lifetime, and which contrast pleasantly with the hereditary feud whose ceaseless forays and reprisals were for generations to embroil their descendants.

To the Christian reader it certainly must appear next to incredible that Abraham should have repeated to the prince of Gerar the same disingenuous story about his wife for which he had been rebuked some twenty years before in

[1] 1 Sam. iv., xxxi.

[2] If the word is not a Hebrew translation only, then these conquering Hamites must have adopted the language of the Semitic tribe whom they dispossessed. The long and close intercourse between Israel and Philistia is certainly more intelligible on this alternative. Besides, why should Abimelech be a translated word, when Pharaoh and other foreign names never are? There are indeed scholars who, chiefly on this ground of language, take the Philistines, and even the Hittites and similar Canaanitish tribes, for earlier waves of Semitic immigration, substantially akin, therefore, to the family of Abraham. (See *Phœnicia and Israel*, by Mr. Wilkins, ch. i.) This solution hardly commends itself.

Egypt. Yet it is impossible to doubt that a second time, and of set purpose, Sarah passed as no more than his sister. One is forced to conclude that to Abraham's mind the stratagem still appeared to be excusable in self-defence. Perhaps it would now wear the same complexion in the eyes of most Orientals. To speak the truth for the truth's sake is one of the very latest of virtues, and in no Eastern race has it ever come to blossom. But, assuming that the unveracity of the trick did not shock the patriarch's conscience, how could he be blind to its impolicy? As on the earlier occasion, so again the natural result was certain to ensue. In that age, as in more recent times, Oriental princes assumed the right to collect into their harem, not always from sensual desire, but quite as often for reasons of dignity, females of distinction who were not already under the shield of marriage. He must have known that he was exposing his wife to such a risk. But to expose her to it at the very moment when he was expecting her within a year to become the mother of a God-given heir, argued either an astounding thoughtlessness, or a no less astounding presumption. Either he acted with a disregard of probable consequences most unlike the gravity of his character, or he ventured to presume in a culpable degree on a second interposition of God. To me the more likely

alternative is, that he was tempting Providence. If so, it was a rash as well as a cowardly and deceitful act; unjust to Sarah, unjust to Abimelech, above all, perhaps, unjust to his unborn child. Notwithstanding, the infinite mercy of Heaven did a second time interpose to save him from the consequences of his fault. The reason is, that it was not on him alone such consequences would have fallen; they would have put in jeopardy the religious future of his race and of the world. God may be trusted to guard His own plans.

In contrast with the patriarch's duplicity, one gets from the sequel of this incident a pleasing impression of the manners of the early Philistines, and the personal nobility of their chief. With Pharaoh on an earlier occasion God had dealt only through the indirect agency of events, which Pharaoh was left to interpret as he could. On Abimelech's house also a plague was sent. But the divine interpretation of that plague was conveyed to him through a dream, and that under no disguise of parable,[1] but in plain words as from God. Dreams form a channel for communications from Heaven which Scripture commonly represents as employed in the case of persons who, though not prophets, are yet worshippers of God.[2] The impression to be

[1] As, *e.g.*, to the Pharaoh of Joseph's day.

[2] As to Jacob, to Laban, to Joseph in the Old Testament, and his

gathered from this narrative certainly is, that the Philistine sheikh recognised the true God and feared Him. His 'integrity' of heart is acknowledged by the Divine Voice. His horror at the sin into which he had well-nigh been betrayed is expressed in language which leaves nothing to be desired. With a praiseworthy care for his people, he warns them also against similar errors. Whatever can be done to compensate for his involuntary wrong, he eagerly does. His reproach against the deception practised on him is as mild as Pharaoh's had been. At every point the chieftain shines by contrast with the prophet. At the same time, we shall miss the intended force of the narrative, unless we do justice to the exceptional position which Abraham now occupied in virtue of his relation to Jehovah. God had raised His servant to be a 'prophet.' With him God held such intimate intercourse as was not granted to other men, even in an age when Heaven lay more open to the eye of earth than it does now. This constituted him a mediator through whom the divine will and favour could reach his contemporaries. Quite recently it had emboldened him to stand as intercessor between the sinful towns and the justice of Heaven. Even Abimelech was to be indebted for the

namesake in the New; to Samuel when a child, to King Solomon, to the Magi. Pilate's wife is apparently an example to the contrary.

pardon of his unwitting fault to the prayers of the very man who had misled him into it. 'He is a prophet,' said the Voice in his dream, 'and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live.'[1] It casts a suggestive light over the religious condition of even heathen races at that date, to find that the Philistine readily owned the privileged character thus assigned to his guest. Some tradition must surely have lingered still from earlier and better days, when God had His prophets on the young earth, through whom He spoke to men as for a while He had ceased to do. Imperfect as Abraham's personal character had shown itself to be, Abimelech felt no hesitation in recognising him as clothed with a sacred office. What ideas he attached to that venerable title of 'prophet' we cannot tell, but the title itself was evidently familiar to him, and commanded his respect. He bowed at once, and cheerfully, to the intimation it conveyed that his visitor was one who stood nearer God than other men, and enjoyed the special guardianship of Heaven.

It is in the light of this fact that we shall best understand Abimelech's most handsome and deferential behaviour to Abraham. From that day onwards he showed an anxious desire to propitiate the 'prophet.' At first he seemed to apprehend that Abraham might have

[1] Gen. xx. 7.

designedly led him into a snare, with a view to avenge upon him or his tribe some offence which he had sustained.[1] Reassured on this point, he heaped fresh wealth on the wealthy sheepmaster, giving him, not money only, but cattle and slaves. He offered him his choice of the Philistine territory in which to settle and find pasture. He accepted Abraham's apologies for the deceit he had practised. He had even resort to the prophet's influence with Heaven for the removal of the plague which had visited his harem. And ere long we shall find him courting a close alliance with one whom he evidently looked upon as a useful confederate, but a dangerous enemy. All this harmonizes well with the superstitious awe or dread with which a half-heathen mind regards one who is supposed to possess some mysterious intimacy with the unseen powers above. And in this state of the king's mind will probably be found the safest clue to those disputed and perplexing words[2] with which he dismissed Sarah to her husband: 'Behold! to thy brother I have given a thousand silver pieces. Behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee and with all other men.' As if he had said: 'A brother of thine he may be, as thou hast given out:

[1] Gen. xx. 9, 10.

[2] *Ib.* verse 16. In the commentators will be found many interpretations of this verse, the true sense of which cannot be said to be yet settled.

but, brother or husband, he is at least, in virtue of his sacred prophetic character, a perfect defence from harm; a veil to ward off the gaze of impure eyes, not here only in our Philistia, but wherever thy wanderings may lead thee! A prophet's wife need fear no harm, and has no cause to seek security in falsehood.' 'Thus she was reproved.'

After such events it was impossible for Abraham to remain longer at Gerar; but he availed himself of the chief's permission to settle within Philistine territory. The spot which he selected, and of which he sought to secure the undisputed occupation by sinking a large well, bore as yet no name. Afterwards, as will be seen, it came to be called Beersheba. It lies some twelve hours' march to the south-west of Hebron. Though at that time included within the range of pasturage claimed by the Philistine flock-masters, it ultimately fell to the dominion of Israel, and in fact constituted their frontier station on the extreme south. The district was admirably adapted for grazing. Just where Abraham's well was dug, the fertile land begins to shade off by insensible degrees into a sterile and unfriendly desert. Before it to the south stretches the most extensive plain in Palestine; while on either hand as well as northward are smooth and rolling hills, free from either rock or forest, not unlike the pastoral uplands in the

south of Scotland—the very country to attract a shepherd's eye.

Notwithstanding that Abimelech had generously offered Abraham the choice of his land to dwell in, it soon became clear that the permanent residence of so powerful an emir within the territory roamed over by his clansmen could not fail to embarrass the prince of Gerar. The new-comer, with his vast flocks and numerous retainers, was at best a cumbersome neighbour. If difficulties arose, he might prove a formidable rival. Besides, his first experience of the Hebrew had impressed the prince with a wholesome dread of the celestial protection which encircled him. Against a man whom God signally favoured, it was vain, perhaps impious, for a mortal to strive. To cultivate with such a man as close a friendship as possible, was the dictate of piety no less than of policy. The measures to which Abimelech had recourse with this view were alike prudent and honourable. By his generous conduct under the wrong which Abraham's equivocation had done him, he had already laid Abraham under obligations; and this made it easier for him now to claim a friendly return. The recompense he sought was a league of lasting amity betwixt their respective tribes. Soon after Abraham had withdrawn from Gerar to the higher and more open ground, where the herdsmen of both

chieftains were moving about in search of pasture, Abimelech followed with a proposal to treat. In order to show that what he coveted was not simply personal friendship, but a public tribal alliance such as might outlast their individual lives and secure enduring peace betwixt their tribesmen, the prince brought with him his chief officer or second in command. This official was distinguished by a title, Phichol, which, like his master's, tells of their Semitic speech.[1] The primitive ceremony of treaty-making comprised an exchange of valuable presents, as well as a mutual oath of fidelity to the terms of contract. While these preliminaries to the final ratification of the alliance were going forward, Abraham was observed to set apart seven ewe lambs from the flocks which constituted his present. On his side he had a grievance to complain of, against the recurrence of which he desired to secure himself by a separate and precise understanding. This grievance concerned the well which with immense labour his servants had dug. On the free use of that water supply depended the value of the grazing-grounds around. To

[1] Its recurrence in Isaac's days, Gen. xxvi. 26, seems to show that, like Pharaoh, Abimelech, and others, Phichol was purely an official title worn by successive holders of the dignity. It means 'the mouth of all'—that is, the vizier or minister, who alone has immediate access to the sovereign, and through whom, therefore, the case of all suitors must pass. This Philistine race seems already to have vested a more dignified and absolute authority in its chief than was usual at the time.

Abraham's occupation of the district it was simply essential; yet he had to complain that it had been 'violently taken away' by the Philistine herdsmen. Abimelech protested his ignorance of the injury; and by accepting the separated ewe lambs, he virtually added, as we should express it in modern language, a fresh clause to the treaty. It was a symbolical acknowledgment, very frankly made, of Abraham's exclusive right to the possession and enjoyment of the well. On this understanding the league of amity was sworn, to be renewed a generation later between their successors.[1]

Two memorials carried down to succeeding generations the memory of this very early league betwixt peoples which were destined to become hereditary and bitter foes. The one was a monumental tamarisk-tree which Abraham planted. It is described as a species of 'hardy evergreen,' with small, bright green leaves, and compact and durable timber.[2] It outlived many a generation, and to this day trees of the same kind are to be found growing freely in the neighbourhood. The other memorial was the name, which after four thousand years clings to the spot. Beer-sheba does not mean 'seven wells,' but the 'well of seven,' or 'of the oath;' two

[1] See Gen. xxvi. 23–33.

[2] So described by Mr. Carruthers, F.R.S., in the *Bible Educator*, ii. 173, 174.

significations which in Hebrew are very closely related. To swear, in primitive Hebrew usage, meant literally to bind oneself, as Abraham did on this occasion, by seven things,[1] seven being from the very origin of history the divine or perfect number.[2] When this interesting site was re-discovered by Dr. Robinson in the year 1838, the name was found adhering to it nearly unchanged in form—Bir-es-seba. Two grand wells of ancient masonry, the larger of which measures twelve feet and a half across, remain to tell of the shepherd chiefs whose flocks browsed on the surrounding hills in the grey morning of time. To this day are still set round about them stone troughs for the watering of cattle. Worn deep into their stone margins are the marks of ropes. Few monuments so venerable as these remain to transport the traveller back to patriarchal scenes. Even should the existing masonry which protects them prove to be of more recent date, there is no reason to doubt that the wells themselves are the very same as were dug by Abraham and his son. On the slope above lie scattered the remains of a town which subsequently grew up. During many a century, under lords of various race and tongue, Beersheba formed a

[1] See Ewald's *Alterthumer d. Volkes Israel* (3d ed.), pp. 23, 24.

[2] Compare the clean animals taken into the ark by sevens. The symbolism is possibly connected with the week of seven days.

frontier station of strategical importance, populous, and alive with the bustle of a garrison. To-day the place again sleeps silent in its early peace, as undisturbed by foot of wayfarer or tinkle of the goat-bells, as when first the tent of Abraham was pitched amidst its fragrant pastures.[1]

The birth of Sarah's son can scarcely have taken place in Gerar. The brief sojourn of the family there, and the peculiar circumstances which brought it to a close, seem to make this nearly impossible. We can hardly be wrong, therefore, in regarding Beersheba as Isaac's birth-place. There at length was fulfilled the supreme earthly hope of his father's life. The waiting had been long, but the joy was great. 'Isaac' was he fitly named—or, strictly transliterated, Yitzhak, a son of laughter: not altogether because of the incredulous laughter with which his father first, and next his mother, received the announcement of his birth; still less for the scornful laughter with which his slave-born brother greeted the babe who was to push him from his place and heritage; far more for this reason, that he was a living pledge of that promised blessing which he was destined to transmit to all the world, and in his very person

[1] Robinson, in *Bibl. Researches*, i. 203–205, gives a fresh and detailed account of this interesting site.

a witness to the gracious omnipotence of the Promiser. To the happy mother he brought a joy deeper and more solemn than even the first strange joy of motherhood. It was joy in the unlooked-for supernatural gift with which the favour of Jehovah had enriched her life, making her the mother of unending blessings to after generations. It broke out in a snatch of primitive song, a hymn of patriarchal times:

> 'Laughter hath God prepared for me:
> All who hear of it will laugh with me:
> Who would have said to Abraham—
> "Sarah giveth to children suck"?
> For a son have I borne to him in his old age!'[1]

The words are simple as nursery words, but they are a prelude of Hannah's song over the babe whom she had asked of God;[2] a prelude of the nobler song which one more blessed than Hannah sang over the Babe she had never dared to ask.[3] They strike the first note in that splendid welcome to the Child of Promise and Heir of Blessing, of which the full music echoes for ever through the Church in Mary's *Magnificat:*

> 'My soul doth magnify the Lord,
> And my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour!
> For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden;
> For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

[1] Gen. xxi. 6, 7. [2] 1 Sam. ii. 1–10. [3] Luke i. 46–55.

He hath filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich He hath sent empty away.
He hath holpen His servant Israel
In remembrance of His mercy,
As He spake to our fathers,
To Abraham and to his seed for ever!'

Two or three years elapsed ere that word came true about the 'rich being sent empty away.' Before Isaac was born, the growing lad Ishmael must have learnt that the inheritance was no longer to be his own. It was not till a great family festival was kept in honour of the weaning of the heir, that his natural chagrin seems to have found open utterance. According to the custom of Eastern families, the child would by this time be from two to three years of age.[1] It was naturally made the occasion for a pastoral merrymaking to all the wide camp over which the young heir was one day to rule; and in the manner of its celebration, emphasis was no doubt laid upon the fact that, though born the younger, he was destined to displace his elder brother. Ishmael must have reached the age of sixteen or seventeen. He bordered on man's estate, without the self-control of manhood; and it is

[1] An instance of suckling for three years occurs in 2 Maccabees vii. 27. The Talmud and the Koran agree in prescribing two years as a minimum, which is also said to be the usual time among the modern Persians, as it is, according to Livingstone (*Travels*, p. 126), in some parts of Africa. References to other authorities will be found in Winer, *Real Wörterbuch*, sub voce 'Kinder.'

not at all surprising that the disappointment he could not fail to experience found vent in unconcealed derision. Under cover of sportiveness, it may be, he jeered at the little master and the exuberant rejoicing made over him, in a way which betrayed the bitterness he really felt.[1] His mocking awoke in Sarah the old slumbering jealousy. A wise or forbearing woman would probably have borne with the youth's natural vexation, excused his rudeness for the hot blood of his mother that was in him, and trusted, as he grew to years of more discretion, to win his acquiescence in the divine arrangement. Sarah was not now, any more than seventeen years before, very wise or forbearing. Her proud temper could not brook so much as the presence of one who dared to slight, even if he did not presume to rival, her own Isaac. It is possible, too, that her former bitterness against Hagar had a little to do with her severity against Hagar's son. With her hard suggestion to expel them both from the home settlement, Abraham's calmer and more kindly disposition refused at first to comply. Yet, strange to say, it was precisely this course which divine foresight saw to be the best. 'Cast out the bond woman with her son,'[2]

[1] The word rendered 'mocking,' in Gen. xxi. 9, has occasioned difficulty, from its combining its customary sense of playful sport with the other idea of jeering, which is manifestly demanded by the context.

[2] Gen. xxi. 10.

was advice dictated in the first instance by the spite of a jealous mother. It expressed, notwithstanding, a sad and stern necessity which God's providence was laying upon His servant. For the second time, Abraham was called upon to sacrifice his parental love for his first-born to his public duty as a prophet.

It only needs a glance beneath the surface to see that the future course of these two great branches of the Abrahamic blood was destined to be so divergent, that their currents could no longer mingle with advantage to either. So far as Ishmael was concerned, the archer and huntsman whose home was to be the desert, with his bow for his best inheritance, it was well that he should be early trained to the hardships of a nomadic chieftain. For his own comfort, he could not be too soon compelled to forego all idle dreams of one day succeeding to his father's estate. Too soon he could not be withdrawn from the presence of a brother whose priority would only inflame his envy. It was the kindest thing for the youth to send him away from his father's tents. Let it be remembered that he was not sent away from his father's God. The mercies of God are not limited to the area of His covenant. That most touching incident of the angel's reappearance to Hagar, when she despaired of her boy's life in the thirsty wastes

of Et-Tih, to the south of Beersheba,[1] taught in a way not to be forgotten this precious truth, that God in heaven does care for those outside the circle of exceptional privilege, and reserves a blessing also for such as are not of the 'seed' whom He has 'blessed.' It was in Isaac that the line of sacred descent was to flow. To his race were to belong 'the adoption and the glory,' the 'law' and the 'promises.' Of them was to come the Christ.[2] The highest religious advantages and the hope of the human family required to be narrowed to a single stem only, out of the various nationalities which call Abraham their progenitor. Yet God heard the cry of the dying lad, where he lay under a desert bush, to remind the world that the selections of His grace never mean any limitation of His love, and never spring from a partial or hard-hearted favouritism. Providence, indeed, moved in the line of Sarah's counsel, rather than of Abraham's; but it is the spirit of Abraham, and not that of Sarah, which best interprets for us the heart of God.

For Isaac's sake, on the other hand, it was scarcely less advisable to 'cast out' the bondmaid's son. His yielding disposition was ill fitted to withstand the influence or endure the hostility of his older and more impetuous brother. Besides, the people of the covenant needed to be from the outset a separated people, kept clear

[1] Gen. xxi. 14–19. [2] Rom. ix. 4, 5.

of Gentile alliances. Ishmael's mother was a pagan slave: out of her Egyptian home he married a pagan wife. From all such close contact with heathendom it was requisite to guard the selected family through which a purer faith was to be transmitted. Perhaps we may add a further consideration. No single home can long hold with safety the child of nature and the child of grace. This early family history was meant to be full of significance for the Church of God. And it had to be made clear that in God's spiritual family circle, or within their eternal home, no place can be found for such as are His only after the flesh, bearing on their body, indeed, the seal of His covenant, yet not born again of His Holy Spirit. St. Paul's use of this ancient household is admitted by himself to be an allegorical use of it.[1] Nevertheless it is an allegory which rests on a deep basis in the providential design of the story. It is no more in Paul's hands than the inspired working out of a hint which lay ready for the apostle in the teaching of his Lord.[2] By his supernatural conception and birth from parents who only received power to give him being at all through their faith in the promise of God, Isaac was of all men most fit to symbolize that spiritual seed who are born of God, and who display, in virtue of their heavenly birth, a faith like Abraham's.

[1] Gal. iv. 21; v. 1. [2] John viii. 31-36.

With such an origin his personal character corresponded. He not merely inherited his father's blood; he shared his father's piety. In him, therefore, was appropriately prefigured all the moral family of God, who in every age have walked in the steps of Abraham, and who are summed up in Isaac's antitype—Jesus Christ. No less conspicuously did the wayward boy, who owed his birth to Sarah's wilful scheme and Abraham's weakness and Hagar's servitude, typify, both by outward position and spiritual character, all such as stand nominally inside the household of faith, yet have not been born of the Spirit into the free trust and love of sons, but serve God only under a bondman's constraint or with a bondman's fear.

The years which immediately followed these transactions were probably amongst the happiest in Abraham's life. Secure in the friendship of his neighbours, with his rights to water and pasture guaranteed by treaty, the shepherd chieftain dwelt at peace beside his flocks. The region around Beersheba is one of quiet beauty, and may have recalled to his remembrance the plains of his former Mesopotamian home more vividly than either Ai or Mamre. His wealth was ample. The years passed by in careless ease, and brought unfailing plenty to his wide and secure encampment. Above all, his home

had now been blessed with the crown of his earthly hopes. His weary waiting through a quarter of a century had been at last rewarded by a son of his lawful wife, the gift of his covenant God, to be in due time the heir of his possessions, but, better far, the heir also of that mysterious blessing which in his seed was one day to bless all nations. What that promise—of all the promises the most vague, and yet the grandest—might turn out to mean, when in the far future its whole contents came to be unfolded, Abraham could probably guess as little as we can guess what is that glorious liberty of the sons of God towards which our eyes are set.[1] But if ever a saint was 'saved by hope,' or lived in an unrevealed future, it was Abraham; and no anticipations which hope, inspired by faith, could paint on the background of futurity, can have approached what God has since fulfilled. The visible prospect which opened before the old man's eyes was at least one of a long and happy posterity. The league of peace he had concluded with Abimelech was like the faint shadow of a far nobler league betwixt his house and the Most High God. That also was not destined to close with his own waning life. With his dear son Isaac it would remain valid, and with his son's son, to remotest generations and descendants without number. Into distant

[1] Compare Rom. viii. 16–25.

ages, pregnant with the blessings of Jehovah's covenant, he could now look forward; and the prospect appears to have suggested to his mind a new name for God.[1] Beneath his young tamarisk-tree by the well of the oath, Abraham proclaimed Jehovah to be El-'Olam, the Everlasting One, the God of an endless hidden future.

[1] Gen. xxi. 33.

XIV.

THE GREAT TRIAL.

WAS NOT ABRAHAM OUR FATHER JUSTIFIED BY WORKS, WHEN HE HAD OFFERED HIS SON ISAAC UPON THE ALTAR? SEEST THOU HOW FAITH WROUGHT WITH HIS WORKS, AND BY WORKS WAS FAITH MADE PERFECT?

BY FAITH ABRAHAM WHEN HE WAS TRIED OFFERED UP ISAAC; AND HE THAT HAD RECEIVED THE PROMISES OFFERED UP HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, OF WHOM IT WAS SAID, 'THAT IN ISAAC SHALL THY SEED BE CALLED:' ACCOUNTING THAT GOD WAS ABLE TO RAISE HIM UP EVEN FROM THE DEAD; FROM WHENCE ALSO HE RECEIVED HIM IN A FIGURE.

WHEN GOD MADE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM, BECAUSE HE COULD SWEAR BY NO GREATER, HE SWARE BY HIMSELF.

HE THAT SPARED NOT HIS OWN SON, BUT DELIVERED HIM UP FOR US ALL, HOW SHALL HE NOT WITH HIM ALSO FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS?

XIV.

THE GREAT TRIAL.

NOT unfrequently it is when a man's estate stands most secure in prosperity that the heavenly Educator of man stretches forth His hand to chasten. 'Highest blessings,' says Ewald, 'bring highest trials.' After many years of unbroken rest and satisfied desire, there burst on Abraham, like a bolt out of the clear sky, the supreme crisis of his discipline.

Yet for such a crisis, as all students of his life have seen, the whole of his career had been one long preparation. Men do not grow to be heroes in self-denial without practice. The abandonment of his original home in Ur had initiated for this man a series of sacrifices. On that there followed first the forsaking of his kindred in Haran; then separation from Lot at Ai, and homeless wanderings in Canaan. Next came the hopes he built on Ishmael, his first-born, only to see them crossed with disappointment. Already he had virtually sacrificed one

son of his heart—the lad who went forth into the wilderness like a scape-goat, to return no more. What has he left now but another son, younger and still dearer, in whom are gathered up and incarnated, as it were, the most sacred memories of the past, and his most radiant hopes for the future? This treasure only he has received from God which he has never been asked to give up for God. Can faith—can self-surrender be entire, till it has accomplished its perfect work? Most good men find that the possession which they have never feared to lose, they do not rightly hold; since 'that only is a spiritual and therefore true and abiding blessing which we are able to make our own in the strife and wrestling of a faithful spirit.'[1] That is to say, God's gifts are not in the best sense our own, till we have been taught by experience that they continue to be His still. It may even be questioned whether in the unthreatened secure enjoyment of a great joy, there does not always mingle some dash of sin. It may be doubted whether a hot trial does not always find its occasion in some moral need of the tried soul.[2] At all events, as Augustine reminds us,[3] there is no way to self-knowledge but through trial; through what he calls 'some kind of experimental and not merely verbal

[1] Ewald, *Geschichte d. Volkes Israel* (Eng. trans. i. 332).
[2] See Kalisch *in loc.* [3] *City of God* (Dods' trans. ii. 147).

self-interrogation.' In other words, God's stern providence must step in to test the latent capabilities of the soul. No scrutiny of our own, however honest, will ascertain what is really in us. When He takes in hand to try us, because He loves us, it is that He may discover, not to Himself Who sees all hearts, but to us and to our brethren, that which His grace has planted deep within. Moreover, He designs by lending to our unfledged virtue scope, and a call to exercise itself, to train its strength of wing for bolder flights to follow.

With safety, then, may it always be presumed, not only that the wise Lord Who guides earthly discipline tries men's virtue for their own profit, but also that He graduates such trials to the strength of virtue which is to be found in each. It concerns His faithfulness to 'tempt,' indeed, in this beneficent sense of the word, yet at the same time to provide that no servant of His be tempted 'above that he is able.' With a task so delicate, who could trust any hand less firm or skilful or tender than His own? It is the highest proof we possess of the exceptional nobleness which lived in Abraham, that on no other man of whom we read—save One—was ever imposed a test of trustful obedience so severe to abide, so far above the average power of human nature, so almost godlike in its demand, as this last and worst trial of Isaac's

sacrifice. It was designed to reveal to posterity the fitness of this man for the unparalleled honour to which God had summoned him,—the honour of entering first into friendly alliance with Heaven, of receiving in the name of the universal Church of all faithful souls Heaven's promise of eternal blessing, and of becoming to after ages the exemplar of that trust in God to which it has pleased Him to attach His favour and forgiveness. The issue of that probation was to justify the confidence reposed in Abraham by Abraham's almighty Friend.

When one proceeds to look more closely at the particular test to which it was God's pleasure to subject His servant, it offers at once difficulties of a very grave description. That a good man should be told to imbrue his hands in the blood of his own guiltless boy, and should be expected to believe that a horror like that could be God's will, or a service of worship agreeable to the Supreme, — this certainly appears at first sight no less incredible than it is revolting. How could it consist with the divine character to demand such a barbarity? How was it possible for the devout mind of Abraham to consent to it? It is in vain that some have sought an escape from these questions by conjecturing that the patriarch may have misconceived the manner in which his

offering of Isaac was intended to be carried out. The divine command is couched in terms too precise for that,[1] unless we are to permit ourselves serious liberties with the narrative. Unquestionably, the sacred narrator understood that what Abraham endeavoured to do was the very thing God's voice had bidden. Neither can it be disputed that no similar command is now conceivable, or has been ever since that time. No man who truly knows the character of the Divine Being could now be justified in taking any such voice, supposing it seemed to come to him as it came to Abraham, for a voice from God. I cannot imagine any evidence whatever which ought at this time of day to satisfy any parent that the Most High desired to be worshipped by the immolation of his child. Such a belief, if entertained now-a-days, would be justly set down to the action of a disordered brain. It would carry to every sound judgment its own refutation. Abraham was certainly neither crazy nor a fanatic. Yet, on receiving this perplexing intimation of the divine will, conveyed through a vision or a voice by night, not only did he not revolt against it, he even betrayed, so far as appears in the record, no such sense of its incongruity with the divine character, as would be, to any modern, the very first and most staggering of all difficulties.

[1] 'Offer him there for a burnt-offering,' Gen. xxii. 2.

To render such a state of mind as this at all intelligible, the important fact on which attention must be fastened is this, that the sacrifice of a child by its parent in honour of the Deity was by no means foreign either to the religious conceptions amidst which Abraham was living, or to the worship which probably prevailed around him. No reader of the Old Testament needs to be informed that this hateful kind of offering defiled the religious rites of the Canaanites several centuries later. But there are probably few readers who have sufficiently realized how ancient or how widespread among primitive religions was a custom which has come to be associated only with the lowest type of barbarism. Yet traces of it, reliable enough, though dimmed now through lapse of ages, meet the inquirer among the primitive population of far-sundered localities, and in stages of civilisation which even we should call advanced. Its prevalence among all the men of Hamitic race who observed the same type of religion as the tribes of Canaan is a fact well known. This of itself fastens the dark stigma on some of the most polished and powerful states of antiquity; on Tyre, for example, and on all the great Punic colonies, such as Cyprus, Rhodes, and Carthage.[1]

[1] Evidence and references in confirmation will be found in Creutzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker*, ii. 457, iii. 393. (I cite the edition of his *Deutsche Schriften*, 1836.)

Egypt itself was not exempt.[1] But what is less generally noticed is, that among Aryan peoples a similar custom widely obtained in the earliest periods, and sprang out of a similar nature-worship. It has left its mark on several of the most familiar legends of Greek literature. It was practised in the Mithras cult of Persia, which lingered to the age of Hadrian.[2] It is found among the ancient Pelasgians, as at Eleusis in the worship of Demeter; in Attica and Arcadia, in that of Artemis; in Tenedos and Chios, in that of Bacchus.[3] It is probable, indeed, that the immolation of a human victim to divinities like Bacchus or Demeter was reserved for great occasions. Among the milder Pelasgians, it did not become so regular a part of worship as those sacrifices, for example, which annually appeased the tutelary sun-god of Carthage, or the massacre of infants by passing them through the fire to the Chemosh of Moab or the Molech of Phœnicia. The general result of research on this painful subject, however, goes to show that even the milder faiths of early Greece sprang out of, or were grafted on, the same original idolatry of the generative and productive forces in nature which found favour among older races in Babylon, Phœnicia, and Canaan. Wherever

[1] Creutzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker*, iii. 214.
[2] *Ibid.* i. 258.
[3] *Ibid.* iv. 94, 188, 341, 715, 718.

the influence of that dark religion stretched, it bore of necessity two ghastly fruits—cruelty and lust; the orgies of the grove and the sacrifice of human blood.[1]

It must not be forgotten that a deep religious instinct underlay even offerings like these. Fathers were no less tender of their offspring in those days than now, but the necessity under which man lies to appease the offended Powers is strong enough to drown the cries of natural affection. Wherever the religious nature has been deeply moved, it has recognised that the Divinity it adores is worthy of the best man has to give. Entire subjection of the personal will to God, and the surrender of every lower earthly treasure to the disposal of the Supreme, form the very kernel of all genuine religion, however they may be expressed. Hateful and blundering was the expression given to them by the Canaanite parent, who slew his son upon the altar; yet we may be sure that was a sacrifice which nothing could have prompted save the most inextinguishable and imperious of all cravings — the craving after propitiation.

If, then, Abraham had always lived, as it seems next to certain he had, among neigh-

[1] Mr. Sayce, in the Transactions of the *Soc. of Bibl. Archæology* (vol. iv. p. 25 ff.), has traced the practice of offering a child for his parent by fire to the Accadian population of early Chaldea. He questions the evidence for it among the Greeks.

bours whose rcligion was saturated with those feelings and beliefs out of which the practice of sacrificing children originated, and whose actual worship demanded at its highest moments such an expression, it is quite conceivable how the command to slay his son failed to strike him as, on the face of it, irreconcilable with true religion. It could only have worn that aspect on the supposition that God had previously given some clear intimation that He would not be honoured or approached with the offering of a human life; or, at least, if the divine character was otherwise so fully understood as to demonstrate that no such offering could possibly be acceptable to Him. We cannot be certain, I think, that as yet the mind of Jehovah had been revealed with such fulness. To say the least, no such prohibition of human sacrifice as was subsequently given to Moses[1] had been given to Abraham. It is further conceivable[2] that a painful misgiving may have insinuated itself into the mind of this dissenter from prevailing religions, whether he had the heart to sacrifice as much for the blessed Jehovah, Who was become his friend, as the idolaters around were doing to propitiate their unfriendly divinities; whether, indeed, he were not loving his Isaac

[1] See Lev. xviii. 21. That the law was not kept even in Judah is too clear from Jer. xix. 5.

[2] This is Kurz's conjecture, *Geschichte des alten Bundes*, i. 212, which Oehler, in his *O. T. Theology*, approves.

too well to be willing to yield him up even to the God Who gave him. Any such misgiving, could we suppose it to find room in the patriarch's mind, would form a natural point of attachment for the testing summons addressed to him by the Almighty. But it is not necessary to risk even this conjecture. The stage of religious teaching at which mankind then stood, and the religious atmosphere in which men moved, makes it, I think, intelligible how Abraham could accept such a voice from Heaven in the simplicity of a faith which did not stumble, where the saints of any later time would certainly have stumbled.

At this point, however, the further question arises, how the all-merciful Father could consistently issue such a command, or appear even for a moment to reduce His own worship to a level with the inhuman rites of Baal. The only answer to be given to this question is one which will best satisfy those who have accustomed their minds to the historical method of divine procedure in the training of our race. Education is impossible unless the instructor will stoop to adapt himself to the stage at which the learner stands. To this rule the wisdom of God has conformed itself throughout all the stages of revelation. It is this principle alone which renders intelligible the 'accommodations' and anthropomorphisms recorded in the early records

of Scripture. In the present case, what we find is this: For once a command was issued, which, while it perfectly tested in the first instance the willingness and thoroughness of Abraham's loyalty without doing outrage to his previous knowledge of God, served also in the end to teach, in a far more memorable and impressive fashion than any verbal lesson could have done, that the true God is One Who has no pleasure in such unnatural offerings. The issue of the transaction ought to have been the banishment of cruelty for ever from the worship of Jehovah. It has been seen how the prevalent sacrifice of children by their parents was the shocking distortion of a religious truth. At the heart of it certainly lay this idea, that he who would be a friend of God must love nothing better than God, nor hold back anything which God's service demands. This is the same everlasting law which on the lips of our Lord Jesus found explicit and reiterated utterance: 'He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than Me is not worthy of Me.'[1] To disentangle this precious truth from the false and hateful inference which had become involved with it, that the literal slaying of a beloved child could constitute an act of worship pleasing to the Deity, formed beyond question one design of the strange command: 'Take now thy son Isaac and offer

[1] Matt. x. 37; Luke xiv. 26.

him up.' The design was both a needful and a beneficent one. It was completely accomplished. Obedience was suffered to proceed to that point at which it became undeniable that this worshipper of Jehovah was as ready as any Canaanite to give his best to his God. The supreme claim of the Divine Friend over the affection of His creature was splendidly vindicated, and the entire surrender of everything to God, which forms the radical law of worship, found a splendid illustration. Then, when the spirit of sacrifice had triumphed, there came, with unlooked-for and startling impressiveness, a prohibition of sacrifice in such a horrid shape as this. The offering in its heathen form God would not have: only the truth which underlay it, its spirit of living devotion, He required and He rewarded. These words: 'Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him,' contained a virtual condemnation, not merely of human sacrifice, but also of every analogous barbarity in the mode of worship. Since that hour, such horrors have been left to the false gods of heathendom. Austerities, cruelty, and human blood have been banished from Jehovah's service. The milder and more innocent offerings of the first ages could not yet be abolished. On the contrary, by the substitution of Abraham's ram 'in the stead of his son,' a fresh sanction was put upon the primeval practice of animal sacrifice,

in order to express the redemption of a forfeited life, or the dedication of a grateful heart. But the gracious covenant of Jehovah with Abraham His friend was the dawning of a great hope upon mankind; and wherever that hope spread, there a humaner, because more hopeful, cult was substituted for the rites which had been born out of man's despair.

It seemed desirable to discuss at some length that aspect of the sacrifice of Isaac which is at once the most puzzling and the least familiar. Abraham's great trial has now to be considered from other points of view.

The summons to surrender his son formed an ultimate test of the patriarch's pious submission to the divine will. How sorely it must have wrung the fond heart of the father need not be said. Each one may judge of that for himself, whose heart has ever held its own treasure in a tender hold, or who has ever been asked to let the best-loved of all be taken from him. Such things have happened elsewhere than at Beersheba. It is characteristic of the severe and noble reserve of Scripture, that it lays no stress upon this side of the trial. Save for certain endearing expressions piled up by the divine voice when it required the sacrifice,[1] there is nothing in the narrative to hint how much

[1] Gen. xxii. 2: 'Thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest.'

obedience must have cost the father. What is brought into relief is rather the test which was applied to Abraham's confidence in the promises of God's covenant. Here lay what was singular in the experience of this man. Other men too have had their Isaacs, and have loved them, and have obeyed God's call by giving them up. No other was ever asked to slay with his hands that very life with which God Himself had indissolubly bound up his own and all other men's salvation. Once, indeed, long after, such a Life, in which lay the world's life and all its hopes, came to be offered up. But then the men who slew it knew not what they were doing;[1] while the few who did half know were reduced to sob out their despair in words like these: 'We trusted that it had been He Which should have redeemed Israel.'[2] Abraham knew well what he was doing. These were the words which had preceded this boy's birth: 'Thou shalt call his name Isaac, and I will establish My covenant with him, and with his seed after him.'[3] How could that word from heaven be fulfilled, if this other word from heaven be obeyed? Well might Chrysostom say that 'in all this God appeared to contradict God, faith to be opposed to faith, and commandment to commandment.'[4] To slay Isaac, the unripe, the childless—was it not to

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 8.
[2] Luke xxiv. 21.
[3] Gen. xvii. 19.
[4] Quoted by Delitzsch *On Hebrews.*

slay the future of the covenant and the blessing for mankind?

The dilemma was a very hard one. To devout and trustful natures, there is no keener pain than when two words or truths of God seem to clash and neutralize each other. The pain is keenest when behind the devout trust of the heart there lies a restless intellect, impatient of the unexplained, too eager and too confident to acquiesce placidly in the inexplicable. If men must have a reconciliation for all conflicting truths before they will believe any; if they must see how the promises of God are to be fulfilled before they will obey His commands; if duty is to hang suspended upon the satisfying of the understanding instead of the submission of the will,—then the greater number of us will find both the road of faith and the road of duty blocked at the outset. To us no more than to Abraham has the Most High vouchsafed such an explanation of His counsels as would make it possible to walk by intellectual sight, or dispense us from the task of walking by trust. Difficulties of this class, however, press with very unequal force upon minds of various constitution in different ages. How far Abraham struggled for light in the fearful dilemma in which he stood, or through what process of mental conflict he had to pass, the ancient record, with its usual objectiveness, has not

attempted to relate. In a vision by night there came the baffling message which seemed to contradict all previous oracles in their most tender and precious contents. Early in the morning he rose up to obey. There is something sublimely childlike in this straightforward and, as one thinks, unquestioning obedience. It may not, after all, have been so free from misgiving as it reads. Still the chances are, that the trust of that primitive and grand old believer was less vexed with the need of a solution than men of a more critical or speculative age would be. He lived when the world was yet a child. Possibly for that very reason he may have stood nearer to that kingdom which, as its King tells us, is for little children and such as will become even as they.[1] Be this as it might, we cannot turn the world back to its childhood. No age and no individual may decline his own peculiar trials. The best we can do is to ask by what spiritual arms each successive hero of faith fought out his victory over such difficulties as beset for him the path of obedience, which has to be trodden alike by all.

The nearest approach which Scripture offers to an explanation of the steps by which Abraham was led to obey, is to be found in so late a book as the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it says: 'Accounting that God is able to raise up even

[1] Matt. xviii. 3.

from the dead.'[1] In these words undoubtedly lies the clue. Only we need not press them so far as to suppose, with some, that Abraham literally expected his son to be at once restored again to life, and only on that expectation proceeded to put him to death.[2] Any such hard and naked calculation on the father's part would have gone far to rob his offering of its value, and the whole transaction of its reality. The emphasis of the New Testament writer lies on the words, 'God is able.' What the patriarch is represented as staying himself upon was not any particular method in which he imagined the divine promise would still be realized, but it was the power of God to attain His end and keep His word, in spite of whatever obstacles might intervene. How this was to be done on natural lines, Abraham, of course, could no more discern than another man. By what supernatural method it might please the Almighty to fulfil His promise, it was not for Abraham to anticipate. Once already, however, he had known by experience the divine power to bring life out

[1] This is the literal and the right rendering of the words in Heb. xi. 19. The sense is general—not, as our translators have understood it, with specific reference to Isaac. Compare the words of John the Baptist in Luke iii. 8; alluding, no doubt, to the same occasion.

[2] Augustine appears to go as far as this in his *City of God* (ii. 147, Eng. Trans.); Dr. Candlish (*Lectures on Genesis*, ii. 190 ff.) argues, on the contrary, that what Abraham counted on was not his son's resuscitation, but the future resurrection-life. Must we assume anything so precise?

of death. Was not Isaac's a life which by special gift of God had been educed out of the deadness of his mother's womb and of his father's loins? It ill became the parent of such a child to set limits to the resources of Jehovah, when the interests of His covenant required His strength to be put forth. A second time, therefore, had this man to trust in One 'Who quickeneth the dead.' From the dead in a figure he had received Isaac at his birth. From the dead in a figure was he once again to receive him. That he might obediently surrender his son to death, he had simply to keep his eye well set on the proved ability of his Covenant Friend to vanquish death in every shape. Here, then, is the key by which a simple faith—strong because simple—may unlock perplexities. With this talisman in his hand, the brave believer can walk along the path of duty in the face of irreconcilables, or what reason must term impossibilities. He has learned to calculate on an unexhausted store of resources, hidden above nature, out of sight, in the secret hand of God. He reckons with security that all this unknown wealth of help must stand at the service of Jehovah's faithfulness, sooner than one word on which He has caused His servant to hope should fail of its accomplishment.

The practical test of such faith is obedience,

and such obedience has to be learned through suffering. But how rarely does it happen that any bystander can guess what tragedies are being enacted in human bosoms! A little excursion by the pious chief and his son for purposes of devotion may have been too ordinary an incident to do more than gently stir the monotony of their pastoral life. Yet few passages in literature carry a deeper pathos than the words which tell how, in the fresh dawn, the aged lord of that camp crept away on foot out of the midst of his retainers' tents, while the cattle, marshalled with merry call and tinkling bell, were going forth in long strings to their several grazing-grounds, and all the landscape grew busy with cheerful stir. How willingly would he have purchased, by the lives of all these lowing herds and bleating flocks, that one dear life which was going forth at his side to return no more! Not to a single soul that we know of did the old man dare to confide his purpose. The entreaties of a mother less resolute than himself might have overborne his firmness. The quieter anguish of a young and gentle heart, shrinking from too early death, might have proved more than he could endure. Like one who carries within him a guilty secret, must he steal, as it were, from his home—the only wretched heart in all that pleasant camp; more wretched for this, that he must dissemble

his wretchedness. It was a very modest retinue. They set out on foot with an attendant slave apiece, and only a solitary ass to carry provision for the road. Such simplicity do great souls affect at a moment of supreme effort. Had the desperate expedition been undertaken under any overstrained enthusiasm or in a feverish exaltation of piety, there came ample leisure for repentance. Two slow days of footsore walking along rugged paths, up hill and down dale; two still slower nights spent in sleepless thought, while beside him on the ground slumbered his unsuspecting boy, in the happy slumber which wearied and careless youth alone can know,—these must have brought such tortures of delay as principle alone, and not impulse, could sustain.

At length, pretty early on the third day, the destined hill came into sight. A Jewish tradition, which is as old as Josephus, identifies this hill in 'the land of Moriah' with that 'Mount Moriah' on which Solomon afterwards built his temple.[1] The name occurs nowhere else in Scripture,[2] and the preference assigned by one or two living scholars to the Samaritan tradition, which, according to its wont, claims Gerizim for the scene of Abraham's obedience, does not appear

[1] *Antiq.* i. 13. 1, vii. 13. 4; 2 Chron. iii. 1.

[2] 'Moreh' is claimed as substantially the same word as 'Moriah' by Mr. Grove in Smith's *Dictionary* (Art. 'Moriah'); but Dean Stanley, who shares his conclusion in favour of Gerizim, is on this point less positive. See *Sinai and Palestine*, p. 252.

to rest on such solid grounds as would justify us in disturbing the more ancient view. It may be no better than a sentiment; still, one would rather not have to resign the pleasant association to which we have grown accustomed, or the belief that the patriarch's great offering consecrated beforehand the very spot on which through many a century the sacrificial worship of his descendants was to be presented to Jehovah. Where the place is to be found, however, matters little. Our whole attention is claimed by the two who climbed together the hill of sacrifice. How many years Isaac had by this time attained, it is impossible to say. He was old enough, at any rate, to sustain for a couple of days a toilsome march on foot; old enough to carry up-hill on his shoulder faggots for the altar fire; and therefore old enough to object, had he been so disposed, to a sacrifice which was to cost him his life. It is clear, indeed, on the surface of the narrative, that no violence was intended. No violence, as the issue showed, was needful. Not without reason had the father reckoned on the pious consent of his son. Young as he was, Isaac's placid nature, however pliable or slow to assert itself against any stronger will, was not without a genuine vein of reflective devoutness; and it must have been something higher than mere submission to his parent which led him to yield to the will of Heaven, so soon as that will

was discovered to him. It was long of being discovered. Nothing in all those painful days can have pierced to the quick like the naïve, heart-rending question with which the lad broke silence, while, burdened as he was, he climbed the steep ascent: 'My father, where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' Could anything try more cruelly than this the iron resolution of the father? His ambiguous reply that 'God would provide,' though it spoke an unconscious prophecy, betrays no anticipation of any escape from the awful task which oppressed him. What it does reveal is, how hard he found it to be to break the dreadful secret. By what means at last he contrived to break it, or how Isaac received the heavy tidings; with what surprising sweetness and courage he also bowed to the supreme will, and with a child's love laid his life upon the altar of a parent's duty—all this is left for each one of us to picture for himself. Nor was there any need to tell how tenderly these two sad souls bade each other farewell! what kisses wet with tears revealed their anguish or sealed their affection! The signs of nature's pain, and the passion of hearts that love and part for ever, are things, alas! too familiar among us to require to be portrayed. What did deserve to be recorded for everlasting memory was not such sorrow as they shared with all of us who bid farewell with kisses upon dying lips to those

whom we love best. It was that far more rare and costly strength of divine love, which against nature's weakness bore up their obedience and submission to a victorious close. On through the latest harrowing details goes the tragical narrative. The erection of a rude stone altar; the arrangement upon it of the faggots which Isaac had carried up; the binding of the boy—a needless precaution—as struggling lambs were wont to be bound for sacrifice; the solemn act which laid his slim and helpless figure for an offering to Heaven upon the rude sticks; nay, even that final gesture of the officiating priest which raised his sacrificial knife to strike,—everything is pictured to the eye, in order that the heart of the reader may well understand and ponder how unreserved was the surrender which this father had made of this son to die, how complete was the triumph of his faith!

In that triumph Abraham's religious experience attained its summit. What other men have done through fear of the Almighty, he did for love. God is to this man a friend to be trusted, even though He slay; to be loved better than an only son; to be obeyed where reason refuses its light to justify the command, and nature with all her voices can only exclaim against it. It is the perfection of a man's friendship with God to be thus loyal. It puts the all-perfect Lord, Whose name is Love, in His just

place. It pays Him such honour as is His due. Irreligious minds, it is true, cannot rise so high as to comprehend this. To them, such an absolute sacrifice of everything to the Supreme must sound both unreasonable and unnatural. Even religious men are apt to find the air upon this height of sacrifice too rare for them to breathe with comfort. It is only at moments of somewhat similar trial, when the Christian is lifted above his usual self-indulgent level, that he can taste a similar blessedness, or feel his heart at one with that ancient saint upon Moriah. None the less does this act of Abraham express the kind of self-surrender which must be natural to any one who perfectly knows God, and is in close friendship with Him, and therefore can repose in Him an unfaltering trust that He will act like God. To souls made perfect and set free from the shadows of earth into that vision of the Eternal Face for which it is our present blessedness to long, such a temper of sacrifice as Abraham attained may prove to be not natural only, but easy, and even rapturous. To live for ever on an equal altitude of self-consecration may possibly make part of the felicity as well as of the worship of the saints in God's celestial city.

'After he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.' It was when the quality of

Abraham's faith had been verified by so unparalleled a strain that he was enriched by an appropriate reward. For reward is ever the divine answer to such virtue in man as can abide the tests of God. Once again, and for the last time, with accents of even higher solemnity than on any previous occasion, there came to Abraham, after this trial was past, the voice, now grown familiar, of his august Friend. It came to reiterate, in terms of unusual fulness, all the promises of His great covenant. It did something more. 'Often before had God promised,' says Augustine, 'but never sworn.' Now, for the first time, the divine Covenanter stooped to sustain human infirmity by the human expedient of 'an oath for confirmation.' The Most High ratified His league with Abraham as Abraham had ratified his with Abimelech. 'Willing more abundantly to show to this heir of promise the immutability of His counsel, God confirmed it by an oath.'[1] True to the ruling principle of condescension, this self-manifestation of the Deity assumed a form characteristically human. Men are accustomed to attest their word by an appeal to Him Who is the greatest; He, because He could swear by no greater, sware by Himself. The pledge that His word is true is His own existence. It was in recognition of the evidence which had just been afforded of His servant's

[1] Heb. vi. 13-18.

staunch loyalty to the covenant, that the Eternal was pleased in this unexampled manner to reduplicate securities for His own faithfulness. Previous to this oath, Abraham had the word of God, and no more, on which to build his confidence. On that bare guarantee he had shown that he could build securely. Because he had judged it impossible for God to lie, therefore he had that day surrendered the one visible security which he possessed for the fulfilment of God's word, by sacrificing the life on which its fulfilment turned. He trusted the All-truthful and Almighty to keep faith with His friend in His own way. For that very reason did a generous promiser vouchsafe to the man something more than a naked word. 'To him that hath shall be given.' 'Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only one, from Me, therefore by Myself have I sworn that in blessing I will bless thee.' Thenceforth, as the New Testament explains, the believer possessed, not one, but 'two immutable things' on which to rest. Through Abraham's obedience have we all obtained this 'strong consolation.'

One thing remains to set the achievement of that day in its most illustrious aspect. In reaching the summit of service possible to a creature, Abraham grew of necessity into the

nearest likeness to the divine character which creatures can attain. The path of obedience was a difficult one to tread; but it conducted him, as it must conduct every one who follows it, into close fellowship and similarity with God. The will of God demands nothing from His servant but a parallel service to that which His own love is prepared to render, nor can God's love seek for His friend anything higher than moral likeness to Himself and the power to walk in divine footsteps. The surrender which Abraham had made at the bidding of divine love was not only the highest possible for love to make, it was such a surrender as no one but a father has it in his power to offer. Through this particular form of sacrifice, therefore, Abraham rose into the honour of foreshadowing upon earth the sacrifice of the Eternal Father Himself, Who is in heaven. What man was ever so like the Father of Jesus as the father of Isaac?

At this point the wonderful story begins to burn inwardly with the fire of prophecy. It grows prophetic of the transcendent sacrifice on the cross, not through ingenious accommodation, or making the most of any accidental surface resemblances, but because at its very core it was an inspiration of the same self-subduing love which inspired and glorified the offering of Golgotha. Abraham's best praise

is found in this, that his act can be described in those identical terms which were to be selected by the noblest spokesman of the New Testament Church as the most fitting to describe the supreme act of eternal love: 'He spared not His own Son.'[1] With perfect justice, therefore, has the Christian Church delighted since the beginning of her history to place the sacrifice of Isaac over against the mysterious and adorable sacrifice of her Lord, as its most splendid Old Testament prefiguration.[2] In the willing son who toiled up the hill of worship, bearing the wood for his own altar-fire, it is permissible to see a true forecast of that most meek and ready of all sufferers, Who bore His cross to Calvary as the victim for human sin. In the parent who, when he gave up his boy to die, sacrificed for the love of God his one dear treasure, his only hope, we must, with awe-struck reverence, recognise a faint reflection and a pledge of His unspeakable grace, Who 'commended His love toward us, in that while we were sinners Christ died for us.' Such love might well seal the covenant of

[1] This expression of St. Paul's in Rom. viii. 32 seems to be an allusion to the words used by the Septuagint in rendering Gen. xxii. 12, if not a direct citation of them. The same verb we translate 'spared' occurs in both. In Romans it is οὐκ ἐφείσατο; in Genesis, οὐκ ἐφείσω.

[2] Students of art are well aware, that in the traditional choice of Old and New Testament subjects to face each other as type and antitype in the mural decoration of churches, Abraham's sacrifice and the crucifixion usually constitute a pair.

friendship betwixt heaven and earth. What a man was found to do for God his Friend, no less, but more, God did to reconcile the world again unto Himself. The will was not taken, as in Isaac's case, for the deed. No ram displaced the Son of God. Rather that substitution on Moriah of a symbolical animal in the room of human life, while it taught that no man could redeem himself or propitiate Heaven in heathen fashion by 'giving the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul,' did also contain an obscure hint that after all human life must bleed for human guilt. The representative blood of sheep or oxen could not be for ever accepted instead of that better sacrifice for which it was substituted. Only by a willing and personal surrender of human life could man's covenant of peace with Heaven be finally sealed. That truth underlay the arrested sacrifice on Mount Moriah. When Jehovah set aside the offered Isaac, and with him set aside as unacceptable or inadequate the best and costliest expiation man could bring, did He not in some dim way pledge Himself to lay upon the altar of His covenant a better and more prevailing Victim,—a Son of Man Who should be also the Son of God? Is it possible that a vague anticipation of this future Victim, this better Isaac, one day to take Isaac's place as God's provided Lamb, may have visited the

seer at that exalted moment when on the mount Jehovah stood revealed to him as the 'Provider'?[1] Then, perhaps, if not before, when the shadows of death had by Heaven's interposition been turned into a joy like the joy of resurrection, might Abraham see afar off the day of God's Messiah and be glad!

[1] 'Jehovah-jireh,' the name Abraham bestowed upon the spot in devout commemoration of his son's deliverance (Gen. xxii. 14), implies that in all straits the Lord may be trusted to see to or provide for the safety of His people and the accomplishment of His promise. The same idea was handed down in the aphorism which took its rise in the same event: '*In the mount of Jehovah will it appear*,' *i.e.* the escape and help which may be expected from God.

XV.

MACHPELAH.

BURY ME WITH MY FATHERS IN THE CAVE THAT IS IN THE FIELD OF EPHRON THE HITTITE, IN THE CAVE THAT IS IN THE FIELD OF MACHPELAH, WHICH IS BEFORE MAMRE, IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, WHICH ABRAHAM BOUGHT WITH THE FIELD OF EPHRON THE HITTITE, FOR A POSSESSION OF A BURYING-PLACE. THERE THEY BURIED ABRAHAM AND SARAH HIS WIFE; THERE THEY BURIED ISAAC AND REBEKAH HIS WIFE; AND THERE I BURIED LEAH.

THESE ALL DIED IN FAITH; NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE PROMISES, BUT HAVING SEEN THEM AFAR OFF, WERE PERSUADED OF THEM, AND EMBRACED THEM, AND CONFESSED THAT THEY WERE STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS ON THE EARTH.

XV.

MACHPELAH.

IT is characteristic of the Bible, that while it never loses sight of its one great interest, which is the development of revealed religion, as little does it divorce religion from the ordinary events of human history. Wherever God has entered into friendly contact with mankind, whether under the old covenant or the new, there He has hallowed with His touch everything human. Nothing that affects the life of man lies outside. As the sacred record stretches itself along the course of what we call secular history, it counts nothing in it to be common or unclean. Births, weddings and funerals in the family; politics, legislation, wars, in the state; the origin, migration, or decline of races—all are absorbed into a narrative which has for its aim the spiritual education of the race. How a grave was bought for dead Sarah is told as minutely as how Abraham sacrificed his son. The courtship of Isaac's wife fills a greater number of verses than the ratification of Jehovah's covenant.

More than half a century of Abraham's long life still lay before him when from the land of Moriah he joyfully retraced his steps to Beer-sheba. But after that memorable day of trial, no voice from heaven is recorded to have broken the silence of his uneventful years. The summit of spiritual experience had been traversed. His public position as the Friend of God, and his public character as the Father of the Faithful, were both assured. His career passed back into the domestic privacy in which the call of God had found it at Ur of the Chaldees. Out of this period of the patriarch's old age, a period almost long enough for a modern lifetime, no more than two incidents are related with any detail; and these two lay close together about the middle of the period. They are the death of Sarah and the marriage of Isaac. Twenty years at least, perhaps five-and-twenty, must have followed the sacrifice on Moriah before Sarah died. Between her son's marriage and the death of Abraham himself, no fewer than thirty-five years elapsed. To us there is something impressive in lives which moved so leisurely that they could afford intervals of silence like these. In those days the river of human existence broadened into reaches of still water, over which its current glided with an almost imperceptible movement. The serene years followed one another through whole

decades, as sunrise follows sunrise in an unchangeful climate. Few events broke their monotony, as in the open south-land where Isaac fed his flocks there is little to mark the landscape, which spreads in softly rolling undulations on every hand to the horizon line. But, just as in those wide pastures a solitary tamarisk by the well may form a landmark seen or sought for day after day by the shepherd who follows the track of his flock, so the few events which did come to stir patriarchal years must have left an impression all the deeper, and even their details must have lived the longer in the recollection of the tribes.

Perhaps we who lead briefer, and at the same time more stirring and varied lives, with rapid change and a multitude of interests to divide attention, cannot fully realize how the members of such a home-circle as Abraham's grew into each other, or how one out of such a circle would be missed. Through long unbroken periods they lived constantly together, and were everything to one another. Of society, except that of their own slaves, there was little or none. The round of easy occupations which made up their shepherd-life left ample leisure for domestic converse. It was inevitable that their lives should grow together as if welded into one. Husband and wife, parent and child, must have moulded one another's character to an extent

hardly possible in other states of society. Stronger natures impressed themselves upon feebler ones. The older generation made that which succeeded it. The experiences and the teaching of the aged father created an unwritten family code, which ruled alike his son and his grandson. Each memorable incident in the family annals crystallized itself, no doubt, through constant repetition, and passed down with hardly any change of form as part of the family tradition. From such a close circle of relations the disappearance of one loved and familiar face would leave a blank never to be filled and scarcely ever to be forgotten.

This must have been especially the case when death made its first breach in the family, and, at the ripe age of a hundred and twenty-seven years, Sarah, princess, wife, and mother, fell asleep. Her death made Abraham a lonely man. It broke the final link to his ancestral home. It robbed him of the only one who cherished with him a common memory of his father's house and the happy days of youth. She alone was left of those who, sixty-two years before, had shared his venturous emigration from Haran. He was her senior by ten years; and her removal must have come to him like a warning that before him likewise there lay another emigration, more venturous than the last,—one final journey into a land still farther off.

How clear or how faint may have been the rays of light which pierced for these Semitic patriarchs the great darkness of the grave—that one mystery which has for ever sat upon all mankind—it seems impossible for us now to know. To the race from which Abraham sprang, the place of the departed was known as a 'Sheol,'—a region, as the word probably denoted, of silence; a dumb land, full of questions without any answer; out of which there came no voice in reply, though the bereaved might call ever so passionately or listen ever so intently.[1] That the departed were supposed to retain some shadowy kind of conscious existence in that unknown place beyond is almost certain, partly from the parallel belief in the soul's continued being found among other primitive races, and partly from the very ancient phrase, 'gathered to his fathers,'—a phrase which demonstrably meant more than simply being buried in the same grave. It can scarcely be doubted that, whatever ideas on this subject Abraham may have brought with him from his Eastern birthplace must have been confirmed or made more definite as he meditated on the revelations which God had since granted to himself. The friendship of the Eternal One was a poor boon, comparatively, unless it survived this life. The

[1] On this subject Dr. Lewis has an excursus in Lange's *Genesis* (American translation), which deserves to be consulted.

blessing promised in that solemn covenant was surely too vast to be exhausted here. Nay, the man who had sacrificed home and friends for God might deem himself 'of all men most miserable,' if no 'abiding city' was to reward his hopes hereafter. His consciousness that the Everlasting Undying One was become his Shield and exceeding great Reward, could not fail to wrap within it a trust in immortality, undeveloped, it may be, and dim, yet real and not to be shaken. Of such a man it was more literally true than even of others that he 'died in faith.'[1] The promises he had 'embraced,' were promises he had 'not received.' He saw them only afar off. Through death he had to go to meet them.

Perhaps at no hour of his life were such questionings of a life beyond, or a keen sense of the transitoriness of his sojourn here, more likely to be forced upon the mind of Abraham than when he sat a broken-hearted widower beside his dead. The noisy wailing which etiquette already prescribed for an emir's wife was going on outside; and the Hittites of Hebron and the Amorites of Mamre alike knew that a great mourning agitated the encampment of the Hebrew. But it is alone, in secret, beside its dead, that real grief sits, silent and busy with bitter thronging thoughts, when not too much benumbed to think at all.

[1] Heb. xi. 13.

It is a kind necessity which at such times forces us from the sacred presence of the dead to business with the living. Abraham's sorrow found its first distraction in those negotiations for a sepulchre, which have been preserved with what at first sight looks like superfluous minuteness. It is only at first sight. The patriarch's resolution to acquire by purchase, and not otherwise, an hereditary place of sepulture, with the importance evidently attached to its acquisition, can only be understood in the light of his peculiar relations to the land of Canaan. Heir as he was by divine promise of the whole land, courted by its petty kings, recognised by its citizens as a 'prince of God,' this man had lived in it for over sixty years without owning one yard of soil. He had acquired no fixed property. Home he had none but a shifting tent. His domain was the unclaimed and unenclosed desert. This was the condition under which, for the trial of his faith, he had been doomed to spend his life. But must this apply to him dead as well as living? Sarah's decease raised this question, and the devout instinct of her husband felt its way to the true answer. An exile through life, he will claim the land as his own in death; his own, not to enjoy it for himself, but to hold it in pledge for his seed, to whom it has been guaranteed of God. Men's graves are the heritage of their posterity. By

them, not by the homes of the living, do wandering tribes assert a 'local habitation.' Where the tombs of its ancestors are, there is the true seat of any race, its cradle and its homestead. By choosing a burial-place in Canaan, therefore, and not in Haran, Abraham renounced all idea of returning upon his old past. At the very moment when simple natures most powerfully revert to their ancestral home, this man turned his eye steadily away from Terah, and the graves of his fathers, and the kindred whom he had left behind. By a significant action, he clave to the new land which the word of God had given him. He hallowed it for ever with venerable dust.

But if the interment of Sarah, and by and by of himself also, within Canaanitish ground, was to have any such value, their place of rest must not be a borrowed or an alien tomb. Primeval tribes are notoriously jealous of the right of burial in their ancestral cemeteries. It speaks, therefore, of respect inspired by this stranger, that the courteous Hittites offered him the choice of all their sepulchres. Firmly, though with equal courtesy, was the offer declined. A casual resting-place in some aboriginal cemetery, among the heathen who were to be dispossessed, might have shown, indeed, that Abraham lived and died a foreigner in the land, but it never could have claimed the future of the land for the sons of

Abraham. It would have constituted no fresh point of departure for his posterity. It would not have expressed their formal enfeoffment in their promised inheritance. In order to carry any significance like that, the founder of the Hebrew line needed to acquire a permanent right of burial in Canaan, through his legal ownership of Canaanitish soil.

It is this consideration which ever after made that venerable cave at Machpelah precious and even sacred in the eyes of later generations of Jews. By means of it, Israel virtually retained a lawful hold upon the land of promise throughout those six centuries which were still to roll away before Joshua led the tribes into possession. The pompous funeral procession which bore the embalmed remains of Jacob back from Egypt, that they might be laid beside his father and his grandfather, testified to the depth of this feeling on the part of his exiled children. Like the instructions which Joseph left concerning his bones, it showed that the sons of Abraham clung to a grave in Canaan as a pledge that the land itself was to be one day their own. Machpelah has thus become a signal figure of the claim which the spiritual Church of God asserts upon the earth we dwell in. One day the globe itself, purified from evil, is destined to become the enduring inheritance and home of all the saints. For the present, however, Christ's people hold it

only as Israel in its exile held Canaan, by their graves. One empty grave near Jerusalem, with countless more, which in their turn are likewise to be emptied,—these are the sole possessions in virtue of which just men departed can still call the earth their own. These are the pledges of its future possession. Their hope rests, like Abraham's, on God's word alone. Its fulfilment lies as far off, perchance, as his. It is not less invisible, save to far-sighted faith.

Of the purchase of Machpelah we have details which transport us to the very scene. They show that the features of Oriental life were already fixed very much as they have descended to our own time. Side by side with the war-like chiefs of the Amorites, allies of the pastoral emir who for so many years had pitched his tent among them, there dwelt a colony of more settled, peaceful, and industrious people. Hittites these last were called, or sons of Heth. They occupied the very ancient town of Hebron, while the clans of Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner held their headquarters outside its walls, and chiefly, as we gather, on the higher ground which stretched to the north and east of it. The townsmen seem to have cultivated patches of enclosed land just below their city; strips, probably, that ran down to the bottom of the valley on the south. For it seems likely that

at that date Hebron lay somewhat higher up the slope than it does now. It was the grave of Abraham which afterwards drew it down to cluster, as it does to-day, around that hallowed spot. In one of these enclosed fields below the ancient city, there seems to have been a natural grotto, facing across the valley to the south-west, which had taken the eye of Abraham. He had migrated from a land where men built the tombs of the dead with more solidity than the homes of the living. Caves, of course, were not to be found in the alluvial plain of Chaldea, but at Mugheir (which we have supposed to be Ur, from which he came) there are still to be seen vaulted chambers, carefully constructed of brick,[1] that might fairly enough be termed artificial caverns to receive the dead. At all events, the nearest substitute for such Chaldean receptacles which the limestone hills of Canaan afforded was to be found in their natural grottoes. The example which Abraham thus set was followed by his descendants. As long as a Jewish population occupied Palestine, cave-burial remained the all but universal practice.

It was quite in accordance with Eastern usage that Abraham did not apply directly to the proprietor of the plot in which the cave

[1] See Rawlinson. *Ancient Monarchies*, i. 86, where one of these most ancient of Chaldean burial-places is figured: a brick chamber, with a vaulted roof of curious and primitive construction.

lay, Ephron by name, the son of Zohar, but made interest with him through the leading men of the city. Courtesy required, too, that their consent should be secured for the proposed arrangement. The whole narrative, which is most minute, wears the strongest local colouring. Abraham's respectful attitude, his repeated prostrations with his face to the ground, the polite hospitality of the townsmen, the difficulty in coming to a bargain, the offer of Ephron to waive the question of price, his indirect mention of the four hundred shekels, the conclusion of the sale at the city gate in the place of concourse, the weighing of uncoined rings or ingots of silver which served for a medium of exchange, and the copious phraseology as of a legal document, by which, before witnesses, the cave, with the field, the fence around it, and the trees on it, were all conveyed in perpetuity to their new owner[1]—these particulars correspond, we are assured by Dr. Thomson, a competent witness, to what may be seen at this day in Eastern bargain-making.[2] It is true that nowadays the courtesy is merely formal, and such generous phrases as those of Ephron and his fellow-citizens are grown very hollow indeed. Still, it seems questionable to conclude, as Dr. Thomson himself has done,

[1] Gen. xxiii. 3-20.

[2] *The Land and the Book*, p. 578 (Edinburgh, Nelson).

that they meant no more in that simpler age, when the ceremonies of intercourse were newer and more truly reflected its spirit. Besides, it is hardly fair to place an occasion like that before us quite on a level with the ordinary chaffering of an Arab market-place. One must take care, no doubt, not to read all the incidents of a story, which is sacred as well as ancient, through such an unreal light as will invest them with fictitious dignity. On the other hand, we may equally err if in our effort to be realistic we rob the record of its native dignity, or vulgarize the manners of antiquity because the manners of to-day are vulgar.

Around the grotto which thus became the sepulchre of Abraham's family, and which afterwards was to receive, not only his own dust, but that of his son and grandson with their wives, there has grown up an interest as enduring and an obscurity as deep as attach to any grave on earth save one. The piety of some unknown age, probably Jewish, erected round the spot massive walls of noble masonry, which still exist. Inside these walls the devotion of early Christians consecrated a church, and over the church the devotion of the Mussulman a mosque. The gates of that mosque, the famous Haram of Hebron, had been closed against Western unbelievers for six centuries, when with extreme difficulty access to it was procured for

the Prince of Wales and his suite in the year 1862. What they saw inside an enclosure so jealously guarded has been told with his accustomed precision of statement by Dean Stanley.[1] Railed off, each one within its separate chapel, there lie the coffin-like shrines to which are attached the venerable names of Sarah and Abraham, of Isaac and Rebecca, of Leah and Jacob. These, however, are only empty monuments. The real tombs, if they exist at all, must be sought beneath the floor of the building, in the rocky cavern underground. To this vault a trap-door in the pavement promises to give access; but as yet its darkness remains unvisited and unviolated. So far as could be ascertained through such a brief and partial inspection of the mosque, it is clear that the contents of that sacred place answer exactly to the requirements of the scriptural narrative. Unfortunately, more than this cannot be said. It is reserved for some explorer more fortunate than even the Prince of Wales to disclose the well-kept secret of the tomb of the patriarchs.

[1] In Appendix ii. to the sixth edition (1875) of Stanley's *Lectures on the Jewish Church* (i. 416 ff.), and in Appendix i. to his *Sermons preached in the East*, will be found a very full narrative of this interesting visit.

XVI.

A BRIDE FOR THE HEIR.

ISAAC WAS FORTY YEARS OLD WHEN HE TOOK REBEKAH TO WIFE, THE DAUGHTER OF BETHUEL THE SYRIAN OF PADAN-ARAM.

HE THAT HANDLETH A MATTER WISELY SHALL FIND GOOD;
AND WHOSO TRUSTETH IN THE LORD, HAPPY IS HE.

WHOSO FINDETH A WIFE FINDETH A GOOD THING,
AND OBTAINETH FAVOUR OF THE LORD.

XVI.

A BRIDE FOR THE HEIR.

ON the mother's funeral there followed after an interval the wedding of her son. The sequence is according to nature. As one generation goes, the next succeeds; and life is made up of just such contrasts. There was no unseemly haste. With that leisurely disregard of time which characterized the age, three whole years were given to mourning. A connection can be traced, notwithstanding, between the funeral and the marriage. For one thing, the loss of his wife must have warned Abraham of the passing away of his own generation, and recalled him to the duty of providing for the permanence of the chosen line. Already Isaac was verging on the age of forty; yet he does not appear of his own accord to have contemplated marriage or taken any steps towards it. His placid and inactive temper seemed likely to cling to memories of the past rather than provide for the future. One can well believe how

tender must have been Sarah's affection for a son long waited for, divinely bestowed, and worthy of her love. With not less warmth did the son return his mother's fondness. As the months grew into years, his grief for her loss seems to have grown the more settled. There came to be some risk of its sapping the healthy vitality of his manhood. For Isaac's own sake, it was time to rouse him by a fresh interest, and fill up the blank over which he was disposed to brood.

The arrangements which Abraham made with this view were determined by two ruling considerations, which may be traced through his whole conduct. On the one hand, there was his settled decision not to mingle the pure blood of his chosen and covenanted family with any of the heathen races around. The posture of religious separation which God had assigned to him made this nothing less than a sacred duty. The dark fate which he knew to be impending over the doomed inhabitants of Canaan made it politic. And the jealousy with which all pastoral tribes of Semitic origin have been accustomed to guard the purity of their race by intermarriage[1] must have commended it to his mind as natural and becoming. On the other hand, Abraham was not less resolute to hinder at every cost his son's return from Canaan to

[1] Thomson's *Land and Book*, p. 591 (Edinburgh Edition).

the settlements of his kindred beyond the Euphrates. The same divine command which had made himself an exile, he conceived to bind his offspring. This Canaan had been promised to his seed for their inheritance; and in Canaan, therefore, his seed should stay. Had he not just taken a mournful possession of it by the purchase of a grave? How could he suffer the very next generation to abandon the territory of God's selection, and turn back, even for the sake of a marriage alliance, to the country from which God had called him?

In the instructions which he gave his steward,[1] the effort to reconcile these two requirements is very apparent. By a form of oath peculiar to patriarchal times, the meaning of which has been lost, the man was made to swear that he would not seek to marry Isaac into any of the native tribes of Canaan; at the same time, he bound himself that on no account—not even to secure a wife from the Terah connection—would he take Isaac back into Mesopotamia. If the proposed bride would not accompany the messenger to Canaan with a view to marriage, then the matter must be left where it was. Abraham could not foresee that in the next generation his grandson was actually to be driven eastwards into Haran by the stress of providential circumstances, to serve there for the hand of his fair

[1] Gen. xxiv. 2-8.

cousin. If he had foreseen it, it could have formed no guide for his own action. Jacob was a very different man from Isaac; and even in Jacob's case it cost a special admonition from Heaven before he was induced to return with his household and pastoral wealth to the land of his father's exile.[1]

To the mind of the steward, it probably appeared in the last degree unlikely that any maiden could be persuaded to undertake the very long and perilous journey which divided Haran from Beersheba, for the sake of a bridegroom whom she had never seen, or that her relatives would be disposed to trust her on such an adventurous quest. It was Abraham whose devout heart had confidence enough in Jehovah to feel sure that an event so unlikely would in God's own way be brought to pass, since he was convinced that the covenant and purposes of Jehovah required it. The strong faith of the master impressed itself also upon his faithful slave. There is no reason for saying that this eldest or responsible servant who managed the patriarch's household was the same man, Eliezer, who fifty-five years earlier had filled the same post. The interval which had elapsed makes it a little improbable. At all events, he was evidently a man who deserved the confidence reposed in him. Head slaves in the establishment of a powerful

[1] Gen. xxxi. 3.

and opulent chieftain were naturally selected for this single quality of faithfulness, more than length of service or any other recommendation.[1] Having spent their lives in the service of their lord, with no hope of reward save from his favour, they generally repaid his trust with loyalty even to death. Devotion to his master's interests, joined to a simple and childlike piety, formed the characteristic of this man, to whom was entrusted the delicate and responsible task of negotiating a marriage alliance for the heir. But what is most curious is, that the piety of the servant is a close reflection of the piety of the master. His is, so to say, religion at second hand.[2] He knows Jehovah, and prays to Him, but it is as 'the God of my master Abraham.' He expects to be led to the object of his errand; but this confidence rests on the assurance of his master that Jehovah would send His 'angel'—a messenger of His own—to 'prosper the way' of the human messenger. It is 'kindness' to his master for which he entreats the half-known God Whom he worships, and for which, at a later stage, he gives Him earnest thanks. But for such exceptional 'favour,' his behaviour shows

[1] Compare 1 Cor. iv. 2: 'It is required in stewards that a man be found *faithful*.' See also Heb. iii. 2, and our Lord's references to the office of an *οἰκονόμος*, as *e.g.* in Luke xii. 42-48.

[2] That the narrative in Gen. xxiv. is so constructed as strongly to suggest this dependence of the steward's religion on his master's, is evident from verses 12, 14, 27, 40 (quoting verse 7), and 48.

that he anticipated for his errand poor success. The entire dependence of an honest, ignorant heart upon his lord, even in matters of the highest moment, could hardly be more touchingly portrayed. Yet, that a slave, probably of heathen origin, should have attained even to this degree of acquaintance with the relation in which Abraham stood to Jehovah, and had learnt to imitate to this extent his master's trust in Jehovah's guidance, testifies how thoroughly the patriarch had discharged the duty God expected him to discharge. Clearly, he had been accustomed to command his household as well as his children to keep the way of Jehovah.[1]

It is thus a pleasant glimpse the narrative of the twenty-fourth chapter affords into the relations of chief to serf, as well as the childlike, unaffected piety which formed the best side of patriarchal life. It gives us also a beautiful picture of patriarchal manners. As a narrative, this chapter has no superior even in the Book of Genesis. All critics have noticed its rich, soft, and placid style. The repose and fulness with which it flows along befit a holy bridal. Full of such touches of nature as speak to men's hearts in every age, it breathes none the less the peculiar innocence and simple grace of primitive and pastoral life. For the first time since the sinless loves of Eden were blasted, it

[1] Gen. xviii. 19.

shows us wedlock receiving a fresh consecration from His hand Who had once more become the Friend of man. Within the shelter of God's covenant, love grows pure again, and puts on a symbolic, almost sacramental character. The wooing of Rebecca and her betrothal to Isaac are the earliest in a happy series of Bible passages devoted to the elevation of the marriage bond; a series which includes the romantic service of Jacob, the espousals of Ruth, the fidelity of the tempted Bride in the Canticles, and the wedding feast at Cana.

When Abraham set out from Beersheba to offer up Isaac, his modest escort went on foot, with an ass for its solitary beast of burden. When his servant marched forth to bring home Isaac's bride, a stately caravan of ten laden camels, with their drivers, bespoke the dignity of the shepherd-king. The camels went forth burdened with costly bridal gifts. They came home again laden with more costly spoil—for they bore back the bride and her attendant maidens. It was a long and not always a safe route. It led across a desert which had never been crossed before by any of Abraham's men since Abraham himself first migrated out of Haran. The means of communication between Mesopotamia and Canaan must, at that day, have been both scanty and precarious. Yet

when Abraham watched his embassy depart, he knew what they should find when they reached his distant home. For not very long before, tidings had reached him of the state of his father's family in Haran.[1] His only surviving brother, Nahor, had been blessed with twelve sons,—eight by his wife, who was also a relative, and four by a concubine. Of these sons, some at least were already the fathers of grown-up children. In so wide a circle of kindred, Abraham might reasonably hope for a favourable reception to his proposal that the two houses should be united by a new bond. His caravan made straight, therefore, for the city of Nahor.

Haran or Carrhæ was a meeting-place of several desert routes. It occupied, as we saw,[2] a favourable site on an affluent of the Euphrates, in the midst of a plain lying at the foot of Mount Masius. Some time before sunset the caravan arrived at the public well outside the town, which was the natural halting-place for travellers. Here the camels were made to kneel for rest, and partially unloaded, while the party paused to await some further indication how to proceed. The good steward solemnly committed the success of his mission to the guidance of Providence. At the same time he showed a shrewd enough eye for probabilities. He knew that an hour or two before sunset, when the heat of the

[1] See Gen. xxii. 20-24. [2] Page 25.

day had declined, the women would troop out from the town in bands, to draw their customary supply of water for the evening meal. From one or other of the well-to-do families in the place, he could safely depend on receiving the needful hospitality for his cattle and his men. That duty is never omitted in a land where inns are unknown. Besides this, there were pretty certain to be found amongst the village maidens some representatives of the Nahor family, and probably enough the destined bride herself. No better place in which to find her could be hit upon. To test the will of Heaven, he proposed to himself a sign, in what we might call genuine Oriental fashion, were it not rather a fashion common to all devout but simple and half-instructed minds. He would ask of some maiden a drink of water, and if she offered to draw water for the camels also, he would take it for a sign that she was the chosen one. It seems a trifle, yet it really formed not a bad test of character in a Syrian girl. It betokened a certain ready kindness of nature which was prompt to outrun the requirements of conventional politeness. In such trivial, unstudied acts, we often have a tolerably sure index to character. On incidents as slight as this how often have the gravest issues depended!

The little scheme succeeded to admiration. It was Rebekah whose ripe beauty in its glorious

spring-time caught first the stranger's eye, as she approached with the free step of a chief's daughter, bearing her pitcher gracefully poised, after the Syrian fashion, on her shoulder. It was Rebekah whose impulsive and decisive temper, more generous in her youth than when after years had developed its vein of craftiness, moved her to fulfil the appointed sign. With sprightly pleasure, making her fair face glow in the evening light, she hastened to empty her pitcher into the stone trough or gutter for the cattle which stood by the mouth of the well, then ran down the steps for more—glad to find in kindly activity something to vary the monotony of her wonted evening task. The character of this beautiful woman, who was about to enter the chosen circle and carry her contribution to the future race of Israel, was not of the same high type as Abraham, or even as Sarah. Much of Sarah's proud spirit was hers, indeed, with a similar tendency to give way to passing impulses. She was a woman of partialities, of likes and dislikes, to which she knew how to give energetic play. She shared the quick wit and fertility of resource which characterized both her brother Laban and her niece Rachel; but she gave no indication of that deeper sense of spiritual truth which had been the distinction of the Abrahamic branch of the family. Over the far less decided nature of her future husband

she was destined to exert an influence only too great. Her character she transmitted in equal proportions to her twin sons. Esau shared his mother's restless energy and decision. Her favourite Jacob inherited her love of scheming.

Such was the woman on whom the steward gazed with surprise, while she steadily went on with her self-imposed labour, till all his ten camels had slaked their thirst. The token he asked had been so singularly fulfilled, that he unpacked his presents before it occurred to him to inquire whether the maiden came of the desired lineage. When he knew that, he hesitated no longer, but decked Rebecca with rich trinkets, dear in all ages to Eastern maidens: a golden nose-ring, and a pair of heavy golden armlets. It was her turn now to be astonished; especially when she gathered whose servant he was, and from his fervent thanksgiving, perhaps, divined with a woman's quickness what his errand might prove to be. With characteristic impetuosity, she ran with the news to her mother. All that followed was natural enough. Her father, Bethuel, whether through age or a feebler nature, appears to have kept in the background of that pastoral household. Laban, whose character resembled his sister's, only with a stronger dash of greed, came to the front. He had indeed a right, according to the ideas of the time, to act as the guardian of his sister; and

in this capacity to undertake the management of the transaction. Small management, however, was required. God had taken this wooing into His own hand. The steward's naïve recital of his story left the relatives nothing to say. In coincidences so marked, following upon prayers so specific, they likewise read Heaven's own approval of the match. As for the bride, she possessed, according to Oriental ideas, little choice in the matter. On the subordinate point of her readiness to start without delay, she was indeed consulted next morning; and her frank, resolute reply paints her character. But of her willingness to go to a foreign land in order to become the wife of an unknown cousin, no question was made, since the disposal of an Eastern maiden lay with her next of kin. So, after lavish gifts from their rich relative had gladdened these shepherds, they sent away the flower of their house under the care of Deborah, who had been her foster nurse and attendant from childhood. They sent her away with an outspoken benediction, which carries a ring half of proverb and half of prophecy:

> 'Thou art our sister;
> Be the mother of thousands of ten thousands!
> And let thy seed possess the gate of their enemies!'

The closing scene in this imperishable idyll is no less gracefully handled. Isaac had just re-

turned from a visit of inspection to those sheep-stations of his father which lay deepest in the southern desert. I presume that Mamre—dearer now than ever—continued to be the head-quarters of Abraham's increasing household; but as population grew denser and cultivators settled on the tilled land, a nomad sheikh would be forced to push his flocks farther into the 'Negeb' or pastoral south-land, which stretched, like another Goshen,[1] between the arable hills of Judea and the barren gravel of the Et-tih desert. On this occasion Isaac had only been visiting his flocks by the well of Hagar—the well called Lahai-roi—which lay a good way south of Beer-sheba. At a later period he made that remote station his place of residence.[2]

On an evening after his return, he chanced to walk forth of the encampment into the cultivated fields, which must have bordered it on the north, mournfully musing, it may be, over his mother's memory; praying also, it may well be, in more cheerful mood, as his thoughts turned from the image of his lost mother to the new bride who might daily be looked for, and the brighter future which she was to make for him. The character of Isaac is not one of those which strike the imagination, or greatly change the

[1] This name is applied to it, indeed, as well as to the corresponding border territory which divided Egypt from the desert; Josh. x. 41; xi. 16.

[2] Gen. xxv. 11.

world. But it is a lovable character for all that. His father's goodness he retained, though not his greatness. The key-note of his nature was that willingness to yield in silence to the will of others, of which so extraordinary a proof had been afforded at Moriah. Slow and infirm in action, shunning strife with his whole heart, he appeared to best advantage when called to suffer wrong. It is significant of the same disposition, that his spiritual life should have reposed on religious awe. The God of Abraham was also known as 'the Fear of Isaac.'[1] At the same time there was in him, as often in such men, a clinging to stronger natures, especially of the other sex; with much tenderness, therefore, and inwardness in the domestic affections, as well as a vein of quiet sentiment, such as one hardly expects to find in the earlier or ruder ages of society. For this reason, probably, Isaac strikes us as a more modern man than any other of the Hebrew fathers. His physique can scarcely have been robust, although he lingered to a greater age than either his father or his son. Fifty years before his death, he is represented as already a blind, bedridden invalid, in daily apprehension of his end.[2] And though he lived to see his sons old men, and his grandson Joseph sold into Egypt, yet during the whole of that last half-century of his life, he disappears

[1] See Gen. xxxi. 42, 53. [2] Gen. xxvii. 1, 2.

entirely from the family annals. One can easily see how natural it was that such a man had drooped on the removal of his mother; how readily, too, his nature would take hold of and cling to the vigorous and cheery young maiden who was now on her way to occupy that mother's tent.[1]

While Isaac mused thus in the field, he chanced to raise his eyes, which sadly sought the ground, and saw the expected caravan drawing near. Eastern etiquette required that Rebekah should dismount from her camel to meet one of the other sex. Still more was it becoming to veil herself in the presence of her destined bridegroom. In such a casual, informal fashion did these two meet, whom by His wise and singular providence God was bringing together. Nevertheless, they were made for one another; and the first frank welcome with which cousin greeted cousin, ripened into a closer and dearer love, that was to fill all their long and placid lives.

[1] For this sketch of Isaac's character, as well as for those of Abraham and others, I have been somewhat indebted to Niemeyer (*Charakteristiken*, 2ter Theil, Halle 1830).

XVII.

CLOSING YEARS.

YOUR FATHER ABRAHAM REJOICED TO SEE MY DAY: AND HE SAW IT, AND WAS GLAD.

THOU, ISRAEL, ART MY SERVANT, JACOB WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN, THE SEED OF ABRAHAM MY FRIEND.

BLESSED BE THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL!
FOR HE HATH VISITED AND REDEEMED HIS PEOPLE,
AND HATH RAISED UP AN HORN OF SALVATION FOR US: . . .
TO PERFORM THE MERCY PROMISED TO OUR FATHERS,
AND TO REMEMBER HIS HOLY COVENANT,
THE OATH WHICH HE SWARE TO OUR FATHER ABRAHAM.

XVII.

CLOSING YEARS.

NO incident in Abraham's career is more obscure than his marriage with Keturah. It is not expressly stated that this connection was formed after Sarah's decease, and the mere fact that it is mentioned after that event would not of itself prove it to be later in order of occurrence. If it happened during his wife's lifetime,[1] part of the difficulty which attaches to such a fresh alliance would disappear. At the same time, it must be confessed that the structure of the narrative naturally suggests that Sarah was dead before the marriage with Keturah, and the other probabilities of the case strongly support this view. His wife's decease, and the marriage of the only son who remained at home, left Abraham peculiarly in need of female society; and though the second marriage of a very old man under parallel circumstances jars a little

[1] Keil, Poole (in Smith's *Dictionary*), and Kitto (*Biblical Cyclopædia*) are among those who take this view.

upon the modern or Christian ideal of widowhood, yet it is exposed to no serious objection. How an Oriental might regard such a situation is perhaps to be gathered from the somewhat similar case of King David.[1] The real difficulty lies in this, that if he married again after Sarah's death, then six sons were born to him[2] after he had attained the age of one hundred and thirty-seven years. In itself this appears improbable enough; and it must also be recollected that, when only an hundred, he already considered himself too old to become a father.[3] The miraculous rejuvenation of his physical powers previous to the birth of Isaac has been relied on as a possible explanation. It is certainly conceivable that the youthful vigour then restored may have postponed till a very advanced period the approach of the characteristic infirmities of old age. At the same time, this explanation, though a possible one, can hardly be said to remove all difficulty from the narrative. Perhaps we are not justified in concluding that a man at that period of the world was too old to have a family, even at the extreme age which Abraham had attained before he lost his wife. His own words, when he was an hundred years old, imply that such an occurrence was then improbable; but they can-

[1] 1 Kings i. 1. [2] Gen. xxv. 2.
[3] See Gen. xvii. 17, and compare the comment on it in Rom. iv. 19.

not fairly be pressed any farther. The single phrase which St. Paul founds on the same passage, when he speaks of the patriarch's body as 'now dead,'[1] certainly implies a very high degree of improbability, to say the least. Still, both the words of Abraham himself and this deduction by the apostle occur in a rhetorical connection; so that it would be rash to base on them any strict conclusion as to a physiological fact. Historically, it must be owned that we know nothing at all respecting the decay of physical energy at such advanced stages of human life during the patriarchal period. The difficulty, therefore, may most wisely be left, like many others, among the unresolved questions in which data fail us for a certain decision.

The origin or nationality of Keturah is unknown. Unlike his former marriages, this connection lay entirely outside the history of revelation, and for that reason is dismissed with the briefest possible notice. In all likelihood she was slave-born, in which case she would not become a wife, like Sarah, of the first rank, but only of the second, like Hagar. The term 'concubine' is expressly applied to her in a very late document, the Books of Chronicles.[2] Even in the original record of

[1] Rom. iv. 19.

[2] 1 Chron. i. 32. It occurs in what is plainly a genealogical table, borrowed from documents much older than the compiler's own day.

Genesis, an expression is found[1] which may be intended to imply that her position was on a level with that of Hagar. A marriage of this class constituted a perfectly legal and valid union. It formed a permanent conjugal relationship, to the duties of which both parties were bound to be faithful, and which could only be dissolved by divorce or death. The principal points in which it differed from marriage of the first degree were two: it conferred upon the wife a lower social status, and the issue of it, though legitimate, possessed no legal claim upon the inheritance. Hence Keturah would not be, like Sarah, the equal consort of her princely husband, even though she may have succeeded to Sarah's bed; and it is certain that her six sons did not share the estate with Isaac on their father's death. The usage of these Semitic tribes during patriarchal times seems to have recognised only an intestate succession, regulated by fixed descent in the line of male issue by the primary wife.[2] The only mode, therefore, in which provision could be made for the children of secondary marriages, was for the parent to endow them during his own lifetime with a portion of his property. This is accordingly what Abraham did with his second family.[3] Since he survived

[1] 'Sons of the concubines,' in Gen. xxv. 6.

[2] Consult Delitzsch, *Genesis, in loc.*

[3] Gen. xxv. 5, 6.

Sarah his wife no fewer than forty years, there was time enough for the six boys of Keturah to grow up to manhood, and receive before his death, from the ample pastoral wealth of the great emir, flocks and herds sufficient to set them up on their own account. In order to avoid all risk of future unpleasantness, and to leave the original settlement in Isaac's unencumbered occupation, Abraham prudently sent these young sheikhs into unoccupied territory to the eastward of his own pasture-lands. There they became the founders of Arab tribes, which in subsequent ages extended from the Elanitic gulf of the Red Sea through Arabia Felix into the plateau which stretches on the farther side of Moab. Our knowledge of Arabic ethnology is still too scanty to enable us to trace with certainty the tribes which owe their origin to certain of these children of the patriarch. The names of others, as of Medan and the two sons of Jokshan (who were Sheba and Dedan), occur in the later books of Scripture in connection either with Arab clans or with districts in Arabia known to the Israelites. One of the three friends of Job, Bildad, is described as descended from the family of Shuah, another of the Keturahites. With the posterity of another, history brings us into early and frequent contact. The Midianites appear to have been a tribe of travelling mer-

chants, into whose hands the carrying trade betwixt Egypt and the remote East very soon came to be placed. The 'Ishmaelites,' who bore young Joseph into slavery, are also called by this name;[1] but this may only show that the word had lost, when the narrative was written, its strict tribal application, and become a synonym for a caravan trader. The whole of the powerful clan of Midian was probably not connected with the peaceful traffic of the Syrian desert; for both at its entrance into Canaan[2] and under the rule of the Judges,[3] Israel came into unhappy relations with a portion of the same race, which appears, like the modern Bedawin, to have been the nomad scourge of the trans-Jordanic region. Thus, through the numerous offshoots of the Keturah line, as well as through Hagar's son, there was abundantly fulfilled that portion of the covenant promise which predicted for the patriarch a multitudinous and enduring posterity: 'Thy name shall be Abraham: for a father of many nations have I made thee.'

At length the time drew on when this great and fruitful life should close. It pleased God to spare His aged servant long enough to see

[1] Gen. xxxvii. 27, 28, 36.
[2] Num. xxv. 6-18, xxxi. 1-12.
[3] Judg. vi.

the stock of Isaac, after twenty years of waiting and of barrenness, blossom in a double birth. In the twins born to Rebekah was renewed the joyful 'laughter' which had hailed the child of Sarah. And the brief, strange oracle which was granted to the impatience of that mother, when she sought to penetrate the future of her unborn offspring, could not be concealed from the aged head of the sacred line. It may even have been through himself, as God's prophet and mouthpiece, that the enigmatical words were spoken on which the destiny of Esau and Jacob was to turn:—

> 'Two nations are in thy womb,
> And two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels;
> And people shall be stronger than people;
> And the elder shall serve the younger.'[1]

To him, at all events, these few words must have been significant and precious, since, so far as we know, they contain the latest revelation which he received from heaven. They came, a late and solitary message, obscure enough, yet welcome in spite of obscurity, to gild the long, slow, closing years of God's friend, with a re-

[1] Gen. xxv. 23. It has been much discussed where or to whom Rebekah could go to inquire of Jehovah. In our ignorance of so much which regards patriarchal religion, it is out of the question to speak dogmatically. But with a prophet like Abraham still at the head of her family, there seems little need to imagine other channels of intercourse with the Deity.

minder that God was still the watchful and gracious Guardian of His covenant. They opened before his dimming eyes one last glimpse into coming generations, and must have satisfied him that God would prove true to His promise, by continuing to be the God of his seed after he himself had been gathered to his fathers.

It is pleasant to remember that Esau and Jacob were brought up on the knees of their venerable grandfather. From his own lips might the second heir of promise learn as a boy the marvellous story over which we have been travelling, with all the glorious hopes which were to descend to him along with the birthright.[1] The twins were growing lads of fifteen, old enough to indicate already what strong contrasts marked their disposition, when at last the weary hero of faith was called to his rest.

Grandly sets the sun of such a life. An old age spent in domestic privacy with the young hopes of his line about his feet; old age dwelling still with growing thankfulness upon the splendid revelations which had glorified its manhood and telling with unabated ardour the ever memorable tale, yet forecasting by the new life that was springing up what fresh tokens of God's 'grace and truth' the coming years might bring,—surely this was a fitting and a beautiful close to the toils and trials of the

[1] See Note G in the Appendix.

noblest lifetime men had yet seen. With his character grown ripe, and his work done, with his name filling the lands, his family spreading on every side, and the sacred line of the covenant budding into another generation, nothing seemed awanting to fill up his cup, who to the end of time was destined to wear the name that is of all earth's names the purest: The Friend of God. Well may the page which records his end say, with touching and simple words, that he died in his hoary age, full and satisfied with life!

CONCLUSION.

THUS have we traced to its close the first great biography of Scripture. Our study of it must have sadly missed its aim if it is needful now to add many words, in order to set in clearer light the claims of Abraham on the grateful and reverent recollection of the people of God, or to teach afresh the chief lessons of his career. Perhaps the impression which lingers longest on the mind after close contact with the personality of this saint is, that no man ever won for himself an equally honourable place among men by qualities which are so imitable and within the reach of all. Wherever his foot trod or his fame spread, the homage of numberless generations has elevated the Hebrew exile of Ur almost into a divinity. In the bosom of 'Father Abraham' it was the aspiration of the pious Jew to repose after his decease;[1] and the mere circumstance of inheriting his blood appeared sufficient in the eyes of multitudes to secure them a passport into heaven.[2] Apostles of such opposite type as St.

[1] Luke xvi. 23.

[2] Luke iii. 8; John viii. 33.

Paul and St. James united in commending his example to the imitation of primitive Christians, even in an age which had seen the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The mediæval Church, far as it departed from the lessons which his faith taught and from the simple worship which he practised, yet canonized Abraham and him only among Old Testament worthies, by no decree, but by popular consent. To devout Mussulmans, all over the lands of Islam, the name of Abraham ranks in the long calendar of accepted prophets, as second only to the name of Mohammed himself. Whence has such wide-spread fame been gained? The reply is a remarkable one. All this unexampled honour has been won in a way equally without example, through the elevation of his religious character. Not as a leader of emigration; not as a prosperous emir; not as a captain of fighting men; not even as an ancestor of nations; neither as a witness to new truths; nor as the confessor of an ancient faith. All these capacities he sustained, and in some of them he has scarcely a rival. Yet it was through none of these that he achieved his far-spread and lasting reputation. It was simply the purity and nobility of his personal piety which made him what he is. He was chosen to become, and he was fit to be, the Friend of God. In spiritual attainment as well as in order of priority, he deserved his title of the

Father of the Faithful. The simple, unworldly elevation on which through a long life he walked with God; the entire self-abnegation with which he surrendered everything at the divine call; the childlike confidence with which he received the words of his celestial Friend; above all, the absolute trust he was enabled to repose in the character and promise of Jehovah, under temptations to distrust the most fierce and frequent,—these things it was which made Abraham great.

What lay, therefore, at the base of this man's strength and majesty of character was the virtue of devout faith. He struck the roots of his being deeper than other men into the unseen and the abiding. He realized the person of God as One Who is real, near, accessible, friendly, and trustworthy. In a word, 'he believed God.' It was this which made him strong. If he was a hero, it was simply because he trusted. This calm reliance on One Who is lifted far above the vicissitudes and the fears of time, lent to the whole character of Abraham a circumspection, a sense of safety and of power, a large and poised repose, which are most impressive. From passion he was singularly free,—even from the noble passion of enthusiasm, which usually lends movement to massive natures. He wore habitually the calm, if stately, air of a prince. Yet this stateliness was no less remote from coldness

than from pride. For, next to his trust in God, his most eminent characteristic was perhaps his kindly and generous sympathy with men. That he was hospitable came as a matter of course. But how unselfish was he, to Lot, for example, or to the king of Sodom! How nobly his open-handedness contrasts with the craft and meanness so often found in his kindred and descendants! Save in the single matter of his wife's safety, he even discovered a straightforwardness in speech and deed such as Orientals have rarely attained. From discord he shrank with almost as much sensitiveness as his son Isaac; yet, when occasion required, how gallant he could show himself! how prompt to move, how strong to strike! At the same time, every excellence of character which his history enables us to trace will be found to have its real root and secret of power in the religious trust which held him to his God. It was the force and clearness with which he grasped the promises of Jehovah's covenant and found in God Himself and in God's friendship the strength, the reward, and the inheritance of his life, which made him of earthly goods so prodigal, so tolerant of present trial, and to other men so princely and so generous.

The personal character of Abraham cannot be dissociated from the unique position of privilege to which it was God's will to call him in the history of His redemption for mankind. When

it pleased Jehovah to reknit the broken bond of amity between Himself and His fallen family, it was with no ignoble representative of mankind He chose to transact. To head the long procession of faithful and sainted souls who have since stood true to His covenant of peace; to be the first to welcome that open and familiar speech by which the Supreme announced beforehand through many an age His way of mercy for the sinful; to break ground also in that novel, arduous, yet now well-beaten path of self-surrender which alone can lead the human soul to perfect fellowship with Heaven; finally, to beget the race through whose chequered genetions was at length to descend the Seed of the promised blessing, it seemed good to the wisdom of our gracious Father to select a man of men, a spiritual prince among his fellows.

'So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.' Much as has been added or altered since his early day, the road to peace with God and heavenly blessings is the same he trod. Fulfilled at last in the Seed of promise, which is Christ, and sealed anew with His costly blood, the covenant of friendship stands to this hour where it stood when first Jehovah contracted with His servant under the oak-grove of Mamre. The virtues which made Abraham great are virtues we all may follow. Surrender of everything to obey the voice of

duty; trust, simple but solid, in the mere word of the Almighty's grace; loyal adhesion against all appearances, both to what God promises, and to what He commands; with a stedfast, quiet strength to wait and hope for His salvation: what but these are the conditions under which any of us in gospel times, as in patriarchal, can reach the high title which Abraham wore, or the still higher title to which Jesus has advanced His disciples? He was God's friend. Henceforth the Son of God has called us not friends only, but brethren; His Father's children; sons of God, and joint heirs with Christ.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

Legends of Abram's Life in Chaldea.

THE following extracts will give to the reader who is curious on the subject of these legends a fair idea of their usual character:—

I. JEWISH.

1. The apocryphal Book of Judith (v. 6-8) gives probably the earliest version of the story:

'This people are descended of the Chaldeans, and they sojourned heretofore in Mesopotamia, because they would not follow the gods of their fathers which were in the land of Chaldea. For they left the way of their ancestors and worshipped the God of heaven, the God Whom they knew. So they cast them out from the face of their gods, and they fled into Mesopotamia and sojourned there many days.'

2. Josephus, according to his wont, rationalizes so as to meet the taste of his Greek readers:

'He [Abram] was a person of great sagacity, both for understanding all things and persuading his hearers; and not mistaken in his opinions. For which reason he began to have higher notions of virtue than others had; and he

determined to renew and to change the opinion all men happened then to have concerning God. For he was the first that ventured to publish this notion that there was but one God, the Creator of the universe; and that as to other things, if they contributed anything to the happiness of men, that each of them afforded it only according to His appointment, and not by their own power. This, his opinion, was derived from the irregular phenomena that were visible both at land and sea, as well as those that happen to the sun and moon and all the heavenly bodies. Thus (said he), if these bodies had power of their own, they would certainly take care of their own regular motions; but since they do not preserve such regularity, they make it plain that, so far as they co-operate to our advantage, they do it not of their own abilities, but as they are subservient to Him Who commands them, to Whom alone we ought justly to offer our honour and thanksgiving. For which doctrines, when the Chaldeans and other people of Mesopotamia raised a tumult against him, he thought fit to leave that country; and at the command and by the assistance of God, he came and lived in the land of Canaan' (*Antiq.* i. 7. 1).

'After this, when a famine had invaded the land of Canaan, and Abram had discovered that the Egyptians were in a flourishing condition, he was disposed to go down to them, both to partake of the plenty they enjoyed and to become an auditor of the priests, and to know what they said concerning the gods; designing either to follow them if they had better notions than he, or to convert them into a better way if his own notions proved the truest. . . . Whereas the Egyptians were formerly addicted to different customs, and despised one another's sacred and accustomed rites, and were very angry one with another on that account, Abram conferred with each of them; and confuting the reasonings they made use of, every one for their own practices, he demonstrated that such reasonings were vain and void of truth. Whereupon he was admired by them

in those conferences as a very wise man and one of great sagacity, when he discoursed on any subject he undertook; and this not only in understanding it, but in persuading other men also to assent to him. He communicated to them arithmetic, and delivered to them the science of astronomy, for before Abram came into Egypt they were unacquainted with those parts of learning; for that science came from the Chaldeans into Egypt, and from thence to the Greeks also.'[1]—*Antiq.* i. 8 (Whiston's translation).

3. The Talmud. The most complete and systematic collection of Talmudic legends on the whole of this patriarch's life will be found in Dr. B. Beer's *Leben Abraham's nach Auffassung der Jüdischen Sage* (Leipzig, 1859), where full references are given. This is the only portion which has yet appeared of a contemplated larger work under the title, *Lebensgemälde biblischer Personen*, etc. Unfortunately it scarcely attempts any critical discrimination or arrangement of the mass of legendary material contained in the vast undigested magazine from which it is taken.

The origin of Abram's early speculations respecting the One true God is thus given in a form rather more elegant than usual:

'When the sun rose in its splendour, he thought, "This must be the Maker of all things," fell down before it, and all day long adored it. But evening came, the sun went down, and Abraham thought, "Surely this cannot be the Originator of all." The moon rose in the east, and a numerous host of stars appeared. "Verily," cried Abraham, "the

[1] This latter extract occurs almost literally in Eusebius, where it is ascribed to Nicolas of Damascus.

moon is the Lord of the universe, and the stars are the throng of his attendants;" so he bowed before the moon and worshipped it. But the moon also went down, and the light of the stars was quenched, and the sun appeared anew above the horizon. Then he said, "Of a truth, none of all these heavenly bodies can have made all things. They obey only an invisible Governor, to Whom all are indebted for their being; Him only will I worship henceforth, and before Him will I bow."'—Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, p. 3.

This is, perhaps, the simpler original on which Josephus constructed his philosophical theory of the patriarch as the earliest monotheist. The following extract from the tractate *Schalscheleth Hakkabala* is given by Eisenmenger in his *Entdecktes Judenthum*, pp. 490-492 (Königsberg, 1711):—

'Terah was an idolater, and by his handicraft a maker of idols; he also traded in the sale of them. On one occasion it happened that he went on a journey in the way of his business, and left his son Abraham in his shop to sell them. When any one came to buy, Abraham was accustomed to ask him how old he was; and being told so many years of age, would say to the customer, How is it possible that a man who has lived so long as thou should worship a thing that is as yet only a day old? Whereby the man would be put to shame, and go away; and this he did to a great many people. After that there came an old woman with a measure of white meal in her hand, and said to Abraham that she wished to offer it in sacrifice to all the gods at once. Then was Abraham wroth, and took a mallet and broke to pieces all the idols, save only the biggest among them; this he left whole, and put the mallet in its hand. Now, when Terah was come home again, he questioned Abraham who had broken all the gods; who replied that

an old woman had come to offer a measure of meal to all the gods, but they had fallen into a dispute because each of them would have the meal, till the biggest of them had risen up, and with the mallet which he held in his hand had struck the others dead. Hereupon was Terah wroth, and brought his son Abraham before Nimrod, to have him punished. Then Nimrod commanded Abraham to worship the fire; but Abraham answered, "It is better to worship the water, which puts out the fire." Then Nimrod bade him worship the water; but he answered, "It is better to worship the clouds, which contain the water." So Nimrod desired him to worship them; but Abraham replied, "It is better one should worship the wind, which drives the clouds to and fro." Then said Nimrod, "These, then, let him worship;" but again Abraham answered, "It is better to worship the man who is able to stand against the wind." On this Nimrod exclaimed, "Thou art making a mock at me; I worship the fire only, and into it I will have thee cast, and we shall see if thy God to whom thou prayest will come and deliver thee out of it." Upon this he was at once thrown into the fiery furnace. Meanwhile, Haran his brother was asked of what faith he would be; who answered that if Abraham came off victorious, he would believe with him; if not, he would accept the faith of Nimrod. Then was he also cast into the furnace and was burnt; wherefore it is written, "And Haran died before his father Terah." But Abraham went unconsumed out of the fire before the eyes of all.'

According to the Talmud, Abraham was a first-rate astronomer or astrologer, and assembled all the kings of East and West to learn this science. See Otho's *Lexicon Rabbinico-Philologicum*, sub voce 'Astronomi' (Genevæ, 1675). This serves to explain passages like the following:—

On Abraham's leaving the furnace, it is said, 'the flames were instantly extinguished; the faggots changed into blooming and fruitful trees; a pleasant garden was to be seen, with angels sitting in it, and Abraham in the midst of them. Nimrod, on seeing this, took it for a magical illusion, and called to Abraham, "Now I see thy might, and that thou art a great magician." But his councillors and wise men all answered him, "Nay, O king, the power of magic does not extend so far as this. Here is plainly to be seen the power of the Most High God, beside Whom there is no other."'—Beer, *Leben*, p. 17.

These stories are endlessly varied, but in all we have the same general features. Abram is always the destined opponent of Nimrod's idolatry, the subject of supernatural care from his birth, the iconoclast in his family, the confessor of the monotheistic faith whom God delivers out of the most extreme dangers, and finally, the instigator of a family migration to safer quarters. One curious variation from Scripture occurs in a passage of the Talmud, which represents him as returning to Haran after the date of Gen. xv., and residing there for five years, in order to convert his relatives to his views, until a fresh command from Heaven sent him back again into exile.

II. ARABIAN.

The most accessible repertory of Mussulman tradition, from sources earlier than Mohammed, is Weil's *Biblical Legends*, translated with notes and published by Longmans in 1846. Most of them, however, find a place in the Koran. In

these, as in the Jewish version of the story, Abraham is a contemporary of Nimrod, who is warned of his birth, and takes means to destroy him, but the future prophet is miraculously preserved in a cave. The account of his conversion from sun and moon worship, given above, is found here also; and the crisis of his fate is told in this fashion by Weil (p. 49):—

'One day, when all his townsmen had gone on a pilgrimage to some idol, he feigned sickness, and remaining alone at home, destroyed two-and-seventy idols which were set up in the temple. It was then that he obtained the honourable surname of Chalil Allah (the friend of God). But on the return of the pilgrims, he was arrested and brought before Nimrod; for suspicion soon rested upon him, both on account of his stay at home, and the contemptuous reflections on the worship of idols in which he was known to indulge. Nimrod condemned him to be burnt alive as a blasphemer. The people of Babel then collected wood for a pile during a whole month, or, according to some of the learned, during forty days,' and so on through many extravagant particulars. At length, 'Nimrod commanded his servants to fling Abraham into the fire, by means of an engine which Satan himself had suggested to him. At the same instant, the heaven with all its angels, and the earth with all its creatures, cried as with one voice, "God of Abraham, Thy friend who alone worships Thee on earth is being thrown into the fire; permit us to rescue him." The angel that presideth over the reservoirs was about to extinguish the flames by a deluge from on high, and he that keepeth the winds to scatter them by a tempest to all parts of the world. But Allah, blessed be His name! said, "I permit every one of you to whom Abraham shall cry for protection, to assist him; yet if he turn only to Me, then let Me by My own immediate aid rescue him from death."

Then cried Abraham from the midst of the pile, "There is no God beside Thee; Thou art supreme, and unto Thee alone belong praise and glory." The flame had already consumed his robe, when the angel Gabriel stepped before him and asked, "Hast thou need of me?" But he replied, "The help of Allah alone is what I need." "Pray, then, to Him that He may save thee," rejoined Gabriel. "He knows my condition," answered Abraham. All the creatures of the earth now attempted to quench the fire. The lizard alone blew upon it, and as a punishment became dumb from that hour. At Allah's command Gabriel now cried to the fire, "Become cool, and do Abraham no harm." To these last words Abraham was indebted for his escape; for at the sound of Gabriel's voice it grew so chill around him that he was well-nigh freezing, and the cold had therefore to be diminished again. The fire then remained as it was, burning on as before, but it had miraculously lost all its warmth; and this was not only so with Abraham's pile, but with all fires lighted on that day throughout the whole world. Allah then caused a fountain of fresh water to spring up in the midst of the fire, and roses and other flowers to rise out of the earth at the spot where Abraham was lying. He likewise sent him a silken robe from Paradise, and an angel in human shape who kept him company during seven days, for so long he remained in the fire. These seven days Abraham in later times frequently called the most precious of his life.'

As might be expected, Ishmael takes in Mussulman legend the place of Isaac. He is Abraham's favourite son. He it is who is offered up in sacrifice, and Abraham accompanies him and Hagar to Mecca, and there he builds the temple. The whole of his relations to this ancestor of the Arabs is embellished with stories too long to recite.

III. CHRISTIAN.

The Jewish legends regarding Abraham as a teacher of Chaldean science and a master of its astrology, passed to the Fathers of the Church; and the tradition of his deliverance from persecution was known to Jerome, Augustine, and others. Naturally his history awoke the greatest attention in the Syrian Church. Ephrem, the great literary ornament of that communion, is said to have left a book on Abraham's stay in Egypt which is still extant in the Royal (now National) Library at Paris: see Migne, *Encyclopédie Théologique*, vol. i. sub voce 'Abraham' (Paris, 1846); and the Syrian Christians celebrated the festival of his deliverance from martyrdom on the 25th of January. It was not confined to Eastern Christendom, however. In the ninth century the story found its way also into the Western Church. His name was placed in the martyrologies of that date; the 9th of October was fixed on as his festival; and he has even been made the object of a special cult by more than one religious community in France (see Migne, *ubi supra*, p. 87).

IV. PERSIAN.

According to Herbelot, *Bibliothèque Orientale*, i. 109 (Paris, 1781), the Zoroastrian fire-worshippers of Persia allege 'that their great prophet Zoroaster is the same as Abraham, who was surnamed Zerdasht or Zerdust, that is, "the friend of fire," because when cast into a burning

furnace by Nimrod, the fire caressed instead of burning him.' (Consult also Hyde, *De Religione Veterum Persarum.*)

There is no historical ground whatever for attributing to Abraham a knowledge of the art of writing; yet tradition in the East has credited him with a variety of literary performances. There is an extant Hebrew book on the Creation, entitled *Jezirah*, the authorship of which is assigned to him by Jewish tradition; a Latin translation was published in 1552. The Arabs ascribe to him a work known by the Hebrew title *Sepher*, or The Book. The Koran (Sura 87) refers to his 'books' along with those of Moses. And the Magi are said to ascribe to him even the sacred writings of the Zend-Avesta. Legends so wild as these probably prove nothing beyond the immense reverence in which his name is everywhere held, and the habit of Orientals to attribute to some outstanding and ancient personage every work the authorship of which is unknown to them.

NOTE B.

Divine Names in the Book of Genesis.

It may perhaps assist some readers to have brought together in one view the various names by which the Divine Being is known in the earliest document of revelation—the Book of Genesis—with the precise force of each, so far as that has yet been with any confidence ascertained.

1. 'EL.—The very oldest and most general name for the Supreme Being, employed by cognate races to describe their own divinities, and therefore rarely used by the Hebrews with reference to the true God unless accompanied by some descriptive epithet, such as Nos. 3, 4, 5, below, or by the article, as Ha-'El. It constantly enters into the composition of proper names, as in the examples Ishma-el, Isra-el. Its primitive use simply by itself as the current name for the Deity must have been already abandoned by the Hebrews before the time when the Pentateuch was composed. Its root-idea seems to be simply *strength*, 'the Mighty One.'

2. 'ELOHIM, plural of 'ELOAH, a form no longer retained in the prose style of the best period, but occurring in early poetical language, and re-introduced in the time of the later writers. The plural form, therefore, must very early have supplanted the singular. This is perhaps best explained from a desire to express the manifoldness, completeness, and immensity of the Divine Nature. It seems to have at first taken a plural verb; but this came to be changed for a singular, apparently in order to avoid a polytheistic inference. Elohim is by far the commonest name in use, and is applied not only to false gods as well as the true, but even to kings, judges, and other wearers of a delegated authority. It is still undecided whether it was merely an expansion of 'El, carrying the same root-idea of power, or a primitive word connected with a

different root, and signifying that awe or dread which the divine might and majesty leave upon the human mind. In the latter case it would be equivalent to 'The Awful One.'

3. 'El-'Elyon.—Only used poetically by the Hebrews; but it was the proper name of the true God as known to Melchizedek, and is so used both by him and by Abram in Gen. xiv. It is also a usual title of the Supreme Divinity (Saturn) among the Phœnicians, and occurs in the fragments of the Punic language preserved in the *Pœnulus* of Plautus. It is put in the mouth of the king of Babylon by Isaiah (xiv. 14). The meaning of it—'God the Most High'—either hints at incipient polytheism, or it may have been a protest against the prevalence of that error.

4. 'El-Shaddai would appear from Ex. vi. 3, and from its use being confined almost entirely to Genesis and the Book of Job, to have been a patriarchal title for the Supreme. Its earliest occurrence represents it as assumed by God Himself in demanding from Abraham faith in His supernatural interposition; and with this its meaning agrees—'God the Wonder Worker,' from a root meaning to effect deeds of strength. It characterizes, therefore, the divine power, not as it operates silently and orderly through natural law, but as it breaks through nature in His revelation of His grace (or of His justice) to mankind.

5. 'El-'Olam is a rarely-used epithet, marking

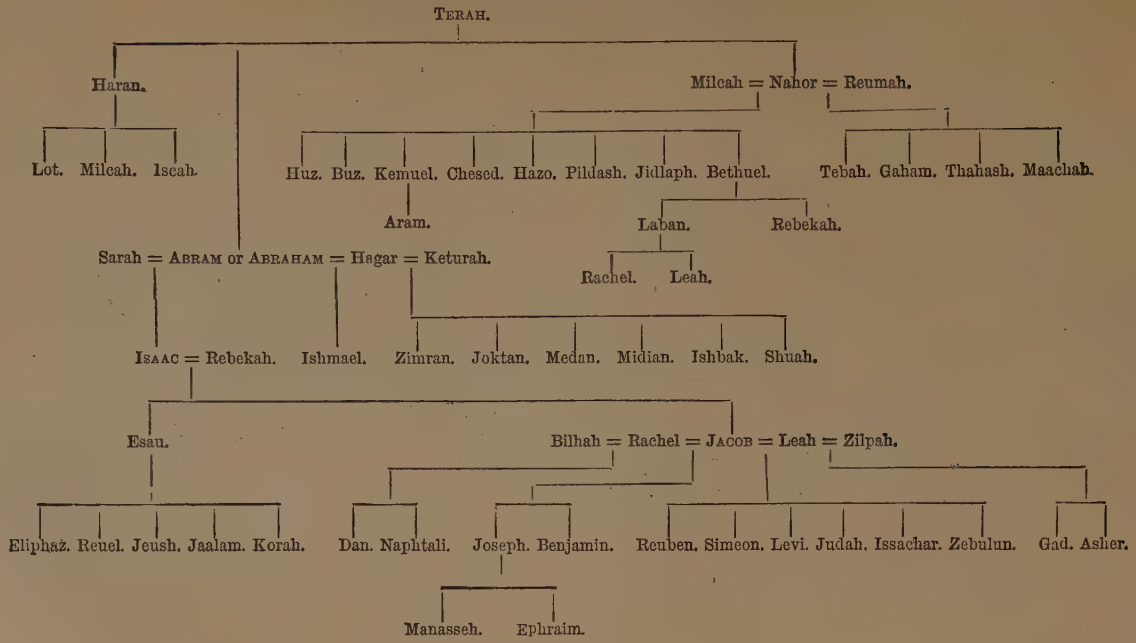
the divine knowledge of and control over concealed time, whether past or to come; for its root-idea of hiddenness includes as well the unknown past as the unknown future. It is equivalent to our expression, 'The Eternal God.' Only found once in Genesis, xxi. 23.

6. ADONAI is not a proper name originally, but a title of honour ('my lord') addressed to all superiors (see Gen. xviii. 3, xix. 2), and then by way of eminence to God. In the Pentateuch and in Joshua it only occurs in address; later, it becomes a title employed in the third person. It is never used by the Deity of Himself. The idea is lawful authority; it denotes any ruler or governor.

7. JEHOVAH.—As is well known, the proper vowels of this most difficult and important of all the divine names are lost, those usually assigned to it being borrowed from No. 6. Expressed without vowels, its consonants stand thus: Y-H-V-H. Judging from its relation to the Hebrew word *Ehyeh* in Ex. iii. 13, it is now most frequently vocalized thus by scholars: Yahveh. Its derivation from the verb of 'being,' suggests as its root-idea the highly abstract conception of the divine self-existence, though other conjectures have also been hazarded. Perhaps we shall not greatly err if we say, with Oehler, that from the root-idea of 'being undetermined from without,' flow the two characteristics of God as the God of the covenant: (1) freedom or sovereignty in His self-determination;

and (2) consistency or faithfulness, unchangeableness, in His self-determination. As free to choose, and yet as bound by His choice or promise, He is Jehovah — the Covenant God. The theory which supposes that this name was unknown before the age of Moses rests wholly on a precarious interpretation of Ex. vi. 3. It is contradicted by Gen. xviii. 14, 19, and xxviii. 13, where the name is used by Jehovah Himself, as well as by such passages as Gen. xiv. 22, xvi. 2, and so on, where it is put into the mouth of Abraham and his contemporaries. At the same time, it is quite probable that the name was more or less esoteric in the earliest ages—a name of peculiar solemnity, charged with a constant allusion to the revelation of grace, and reserved, therefore, for special occasions. The attempt of criticism to assign the text of Genesis to different authors, according as the divine name of Elohim or of Jehovah occurs, has been carried in some cases ridiculously far, and in no form has it met with entire success. Certain earlier portions fall easily into sections on this plan (*e.g.* Elohim only in Gen. i. 1-ii. 3, which is one well-marked section; Jehovah Elohim in ii. 4–iii. 24, which is another; Jehovah alone in iv.). In Abraham's history and that of his children, however, the two names are so frequently exchanged, as to involve the theory in perplexity and complication.

NOTE C.—GENEALOGY OF THE TERAH FAMILY.


Terah.
Haran.
Milcah = Nahor = Reumah.
Lot. Milcah. Iscah.
Huz. Buz. Kemuel. Chesed. Hazo. Pildash. Jidlaph. Bethuel.
Tebah. Gaham. Thahash. Maachah.
Aram.
Laban. Rebekah.
Sarah = Abram or Abraham = Hagar = Keturah.
Rachel. Leah.
Isaac = Rebekah. Ishmael. Zimran. Joktan. Medan. Midian. Ishbak. Shuah.
Esau.
Bilhah = Rachel = Jacob = Leah = Zilpah.
Eliphaz. Reuel. Jeush. Jaalam. Korah.
Dan. Naphtali. Joseph. Benjamin. Reuben. Simeon. Levi. Judah. Issachar. Zebulun. Gad. Asher.
Manasseh. Ephraim.

NOTE D.

EVENTS IN THE LIVES OF THE PATRIARCHS.

Age of Terah.	Age of Abraham.	EVENTS.	Age of Isaac.	Age of Jacob.
70		Birth of Abraham.		
		Death of his brother Haran.		
		Migration from Ur to Haran.		
145	75	Migration from Haran to Canaan.		
		Famine, and visit to Egypt.		
		Separation from Lot, and exploration of Canaan.		
		Settlement at Mamre.		
		Invasion of Chedorlaomer.		
155	85	First formation of the covenant.		
156	86	Birth of Ishmael.		
169	99	Renewal of the covenant. — Circumcision.		
		Visit of the three angels. — Overthrow of Sodom.		
		Removal to Gerar.		
		Settlement at Beersheba. — Alliance with Abimelech.		
170	100	Birth of Isaac.		
		Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael.	3?	
		Sacrifice of Isaac.	13?	
205	135	Death of Terah.	35	
	137	Death of Sarah.	37	
	140	Marriage of Isaac to Rebekah.	40	
	160	Birth of Esau and Jacob.	60	
	175	Death of Abraham.	75	15
		Marriage of Esau.	100	40
		Flight of Jacob to Haran.	138	78
		Return of Jacob from Haran.	158	98
		Joseph sold into Egypt (ætat. 17).	168	108
		Death of Isaac.	180	120
		Joseph advanced to power (ætat. 30).		121
		Jacob removed into Egypt.		130
		Death of Jacob.		147

NOTE E.—The Successive Revelations to Abraham, showing in Tabular Form the several Repetitions of the Promises.

I. IN HARAN. Gen. xii. 1-3.	II. AT MOREH. Gen. xii. 7.	III. NEAR BETHEL. Gen. xiii.	IV. AT MAMRE (a). Gen. xv.	V. AT MAMRE (b). Gen. xvii.	VI. ON MORIAH. Gen. xxii.
A. The Land. Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a LAND that I will show thee.	Unto thy SEED will I give THIS LAND.	Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the LAND which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy SEED for ever.	I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this LAND to inherit it.	I will give unto thee, and to thy SEED after thee, the LAND wherein thou art a stranger, all the LAND of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.	
B. The Seed. And I will make of thee a great NATION.		And I will make thy SEED as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy SEED also be numbered.	This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them—so shall thy SEED be.	I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many NATIONS. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram; but thy name shall be Abraham: for a father of many NATIONS have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make NATIONS of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.	
C. The Blessing. And I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a BLESSING: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be BLESSED.			Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.	I am the almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. . . . And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy SEED after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be A GOD UNTO THEE, and to thy SEED after thee. . . . Thou shalt keep my covenant, therefore, thou and thy SEED after thee, in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you, and thy SEED after thee; every man-child among you shall be circumcised.	By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord; for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in BLESSING I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy SEED as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy SEED shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy SEED shall all the nations of the earth be BLESSED; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

NOTE F

The 'Angel of Jehovah.'

The following is a chronological list of passages in which the appearance of a personage bearing such a title is recorded:—

1. Gen. xvi. 7–14: To Hagar at the well. Called 'Maleach Jehovah,' without the article. *He uses the first personal pronoun when speaking as God.* [That Hagar supposed God had spoken to her proves little. In any case, this was in some sense true.]
2. Gen. xxi. 17, 18: To Hagar in the desert Paran. Called 'Maleach Elohim,' without article. First personal pronoun used again; yet God is also spoken of in the *third* person, as if distinct from the speaker.
3. Gen. xxii. 11–18: To Abraham on Mount Moriah. 'Maleach Jehovah.' Once uses the first pronoun, but afterwards cites the divine message with the formula, 'saith Jehovah.'
4. Gen. xxxi. 11–13: In a *dream* to Jacob. Called 'Maleach Ha-Elohim, with the article. Here the 'angel' says expressly, 'I am the God of Bethel.' [In Gen. xlviii. 16, Jacob refers to the same visitant as 'Ha-Maleach, Ha-Goël,' the Angel, the Avenger-kinsman; and places these titles in apposition to 'Ha-Elohim.']
5. Ex. iii. 2–4: To Moses at the burning bush. 'Maleach Jehovah.' Though it is the angel of Jehovah who is at first said to 'appear' in the flame, yet it is Elohim who 'calls' out of the bush (ver. 4), and in all the long subsequent interview Jehovah is the speaker, no further mention being made of the 'angel.'

6. Ex. xiv. 19: To Israel at the Red Sea. 'Maleach Elohim,' without article. The reference here is solely to the movements of the 'pillar of cloud,' and no words are uttered, so that the passage proves nothing directly. In later passages of this book, where no *appearance* is recorded, the presence and guidance of this 'angel' is referred to. In xxiii. 20–23 (the chief passage) God says: 'I will send an angel (Maleach) before thee,' whom He also calls 'My angel,' and of whom He says: 'My name is in him.' Divine acts and powers are ascribed to this messenger and representative of Deity. His voice is to be obeyed as the voice of God, and he can grant or withhold forgiveness for the transgression of his orders. This messenger or angel is proved not to be Moses (as Kalisch and others suppose) by the words addressed *to Moses* in xxxii. 34: 'Mine angel shall go before thee.' The same divine Guide is no doubt alluded to in the words of xxxiii. 14: 'My presence (panai) will go;' and putting the two expressions into one, we have the source of that fuller phrase found in Isa. lxiii. 9: 'The angel of His presence' (Maleach panai).
7. Num. xxii. 22–35: To Balaam on his journey to Moab, 'Maleach Jehovah' speaks in the person of the Divine Being.
8. Judg. ii. 1–5: To Israel at Bochim, 'Maleach Jehovah' also speaks directly as God.
9. Judg. vi. 11–23: To Gideon at Ophrah. Called both 'Maleach Jehovah' (as usual, without article) and 'Maleach Ha-Elohim,' with the article to the divine name. This personage in ver. 12 distinguishes 'Jehovah' from himself by speaking of Him in the third person, yet is expressly called 'Jehovah' by the narrator in vers. 14 and 16.

10. Judg. xiii. 3–21: To Manoah and his wife on two occasions. 'Maleach Jehovah,' and also 'Maleach Ha-Elohim,' as in No. 9. In this case he is described by the woman as 'a man,' does not speak as God, and expressly declines the offered sacrifice, on the ground that it is due to 'Jehovah' alone (comp. Rev. xxii. 8, 9). Yet Manoah speaks afterwards of having seen 'God,' as Hagar did in No. 1.
11. 2 Sam. xxiv. 16: To David at the threshing-place of Araunah. 'Maleach Jehovah,' but at first simply 'Ha-Maleach' (with article). He is carefully distinguished from 'Jehovah,' who speaks to him to stay his hand. So also in the parallel text of 1 Chron. xxi. 15–30. The mission of this 'angel' is similar to that of the one who destroyed the Assyrian army, 2 Kings xix. 35, and Isa. xxxvii. 36. He also is called 'Maleach Jehovah,' only no *appearance* is recorded. [The frequent appearances under the same name in the Book of Zechariah are in vision only.]

I have omitted from this list several important appearances of divine messengers under human form in which the name 'angel of Jehovah' or 'of God' does not occur. But in any exhaustive treatment of this difficult subject, these cannot be left quite out of account. The chief are these —

1. Gen. xviii. 2 ff.: The 'three *men*' who appeared to Abraham; of whom two are afterwards called 'angels' in xix. 1, while the third speaks in xviii. 17–33 expressly as 'Jehovah.'
2. Gen. xxxii. 24–30: The 'man' who wrestled with Jacob at Peniel. Jacob himself took this for a 'face-to-

face' interview with Elohim, and the mysterious circumstances of the incident suggest a theophany. He is called by Hosea (xii. 4) an 'angel' (Maleach).

3. Josh. v. 13, vi. 2: The 'man' who appeared to Joshua during the siege of Jericho as 'the Captain of Jehovah's army.' He exacts divine homage from the Hebrew general, and is (apparently) called expressly 'Jehovah' in vi. 2.

On a candid review of this large body of Old Testament evidence, it must be conceded that some of it points to a true theophany, while other parts of it favour the conclusion that the person who appears is different from Jehovah. He is more than a mere messenger delivering another's word. At the same time he is a messenger, and therefore different from the Sender Whom he represents. To reconcile such opposite requirements, no more than two hypotheses have ever found currency,—the two named in the text. According to the one, the 'Maleach Jehovah' is a created angel of superior dignity, whom God commissioned to represent Him on various occasions all through His pre-Christian dealings with His people Israel; and Who, in virtue of such a special authorization, adopts divine language, although he declines to accept divine homage. According to the other, it is really the Second Person of the Trinity, Who, in His character of the Logos or Revealer of the Godhead, appeared on all these occasions as the 'Messenger of the Covenant,' and Who, therefore, was at once the 'angel' or commissioner of Deity, and at the same time was entitled to speak in His own divine person divine words.

Between these two hypotheses (for neither of them can be said to be more than an hypothesis to explain the facts of the record) Christian exegesis has always wavered. Among patristic interpreters, the great names of Origen, Jerome, and Augustine are cited for the former view, but the mass of other authorities for the latter. At a later period, dogmatic prepossessions may be pretty plainly traced. The bulk of the Reformers, and of orthodox exegetes in the post-Reformation age, saw in the 'Maleach' an anticipation of the incarnation; Catholic writers, with Socinians and Rationalists, preferred (for quite opposite reasons) the theory of a created angel. This division of opinion becomes less regular in recent discussions on the point. On the side of the Logos-view are such names as Nitzsch, Hävernick, Hengstenberg, Lange, Stier, Keil, Beck; on the opposite, Von Hofmann, Baumgarten, Tholuck, and others, as well as writers of less orthodox standing. The most notable fact in the latest history of this problem in interpretation is, the change of opinion undergone by two writers of such reputation as Delitzsch and Kurz. In their earlier writings, both these interpreters decided that the 'angel' was a theophany of the Logos; in later editions both have abandoned that view, under what they judge to be the overweight of evidence against it. The second edition of Kurz's *Geschichte des alten Bundes* (B. i.) contains that author's original arguments for, as well as his later reasons against, what has hitherto been the prevalent opinion of believing theologians in this country. What principally appears to have

weighed with him in his change of view is the frequent occurrence in the New Testament of the precise Greek equivalent for 'Maleach Jehovah,' ἄγγελος Κυρίου, under circumstances which, of course, forbid the idea that more than a created messenger can be intended. These appearances are numerous enough: To Joseph in a dream three times over (Matt. i. 20-24, ii. 13, 19); to Zacharias at the altar (Luke i. 11); to the shepherds in the field (Luke ii. 9); at the resurrection (Matt. xxviii. 2-8); and repeatedly to the apostles in the Acts (v. 19, viii. 26, xii. 7, xxvii. 23). But in reply to the argument based on this identity of name in the two Testaments, of which Kurz makes so much, it might fairly enough be urged, that in the New Testament the 'angel of the Lord' never speaks in the first person as God, or in any other capacity than as the bearer of an errand; which is the very fact, so persistent and so difficult, that needs to be accounted for in the Old Testament appearances. The monotheistic prepossession of the Old Testament writers is another consideration requiring to be allowed for; but, unfortunately, it may be alleged on behalf of either theory. It is unlikely, on the one hand, that the Old Testament witnesses or recorders of these mysterious apparitions would believe in the appearance of a Divine Person Who yet distinguished Himself from the invisible Jehovah; and the force of this is not wholly met by the later Rabbinic doctrine of the Metatron, of which Hengstenberg has made use in his *Christologie* (i. 239-245). But, on the other hand, the same

jealousy for a severe monotheism must naturally have operated to prevent them from laying in the lips of a creature the majestic 'I,' which belongs alone to the Eternal; and yet this is what they have often done if the 'Maleach Jehovah' be no more than an angel. On the whole, I cannot feel that either hypothesis has conclusively made out its case; and therefore, in the text, I have left the matter in the uncertainty which is our safest resort where as yet materials fail us for a scientific determination.

NOTE G.

Transmission of Events in the Patriarchal Time.

There is, so far as I know, no direct evidence that Abraham was acquainted with the art of writing; nor, indeed, that either his son or grandson used that art. At the same time, we certainly possess among the recovered tablets of Chaldea, original inscriptions as old as the presumed date of his migration (somewhere about B.C. 2000), as well as later Assyrian translations made from Chaldean originals which must once have existed. There is, therefore, no inherent improbability in the conjecture that the emigrant carried with him from Ur, if not written documents in the shape of clay tablets, at least a knowledge of letters and the power to use them for literary purposes. Some slight countenance might be sought for such a conjecture in the possession of a seal or signet by his great-grand-

son Judah (Gen. xxxviii. 18). Such seals, whether in the form of cylinders suspended by a cord to the neck, or worn as a ring on the finger, are known to have been in use from very early times, being found in Chaldean tombs as well as in the palaces of the later Assyrian kings. In the Babylonia of Greek history such an appendage was universal. Now these were always engraved, and often covered with inscriptions in the cuneiform writing. So that the use of letters may have been imported into Canaan by the family of Abraham, although in his negotiations with the native tribes, ruder and more primitive methods had to be resorted to for recording transactions.

Assuming, however, that the incidents of patriarchal life, which have been preserved to us in the Book of Genesis, had to be, in the first place, handed down by oral tradition alone, it is still possible to see how they might descend to a more literary age with no material change even in their form, and no change at all in their substance. Such a natural transmission of family narratives is, of course, by no means necessary to sustain the faith of those who, on quite other evidence, have received the book as part of a divine revelation. It is, however, of great value to the scientific student of Scripture; while even the uninquiring believer, who knows how sparing of needless miracle the divine procedure has always been, may find satisfaction in seeing that the history of the patriarchs might easily come into the hands of Moses in the shape of written *mémoires pour servir*, with-

out calling for any supernatural communication of them to his mind.

The total period covered by three lives from the birth of Abraham to the death of Jacob is 315 years. But the three lives overlap each other very thoroughly. Isaac was seventy-five when he lost his father—the sole original witness to all the events which preceded (let us say) his own offering up on Mount Moriah. During these seventy-five years the son had been without interruption his father's companion; so that long before the elder passed away, all that he had to tell of his memorable life experiences became, past all risk of being forgotten, the possession of the younger man. The events actually recorded are precisely those which it is most certain Abraham would repeat over and over again to his son. His call and emigration; his successive revelations from heaven; the raid of the Elamites and the fall of Sodom; the covenant with God and the rite of circumcision: these were things on which both the instincts of an old man and the duty he owed posterity would lead him to dwell with unwearied repetition. Oft-repeated tales tend to become fixed even in their details and modes of expression; and there is no reason to doubt that when Abraham died, Isaac remained as accurate and safe a repository for the sacred history as even the original actor and spectator in it all had been.

Isaac's son only outlived him by some five-and-twenty years. For the first fifteen years of his life, Jacob was brought up on Abraham's knees. For the first seventy-eight years he kept his

father company; so that he carried with him into exile in Haran a middle-aged man's full knowledge of all that his father knew. Besides that, he returned again to reside with his aged father, some twenty years or so before the death of the latter. Again, therefore, in the ripeness of age, with his interest in the revelations of his house quickened now through his own personal experience and acknowledged position as the heir of promise, Jacob enjoyed the amplest opportunity for thoroughly mastering the story as Abraham had taught it to Isaac. Of his own personal adventures, Jacob was of course a witness at first hand; and it is noticeable that after he enters on the scene as an actor (at the opening of chapter xxvii.), the narrative becomes very much more ample and discursive. No longer confined to the most essential and memorable incidents, it ranges over a wider area, and enters into a crowd of subordinate details.

At the age of one hundred and thirty, therefore, when Jacob entered Egypt, he carried down to that land of literature the entire stock of tradition which had come to him from grandfather and from father, augmented by those fresh reminiscences which he himself had gathered. In Egypt he spent seventeen more years, in close and affectionate intercourse with a son whose devout intelligence was very capable of measuring the importance to future generations of his tribe of all this sacred lore now treasured up in one old man's memory; and very well qualified, had he so pleased, to find for it a secure literary record. It is impossible, of

course, to prove that Joseph or any other of his family caused to be committed to written documents the traditions of his house, as it is impossible to prove that such documents came into the hands of Moses. But we are now, at any rate, on the firm ground of a literary land, where such a preservation of the narrative was, to say the least, possible. Joseph was a member of the priestly college at On, the most famous seat of Egyptian learning. He possessed every facility, not only for having the story written, but even for securing it a place in the government archives; where Moses, centuries after, had by an equally singular providence no less facility and motive for disinterring it. Or, for aught we know, some written form of the family tradition may even have been current among the Beni-Israel from the days of the Hebrew Vizier to the days of the Hebrew Foundling-Prince. It is sufficient to indicate by what a natural succession of circumstances the most minute facts recorded of Abraham might find a written record after an interval of only one hundred and fifteen years (from his death till the removal to Egypt), that interval being bridged by the single life of Jacob.

THE END.

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